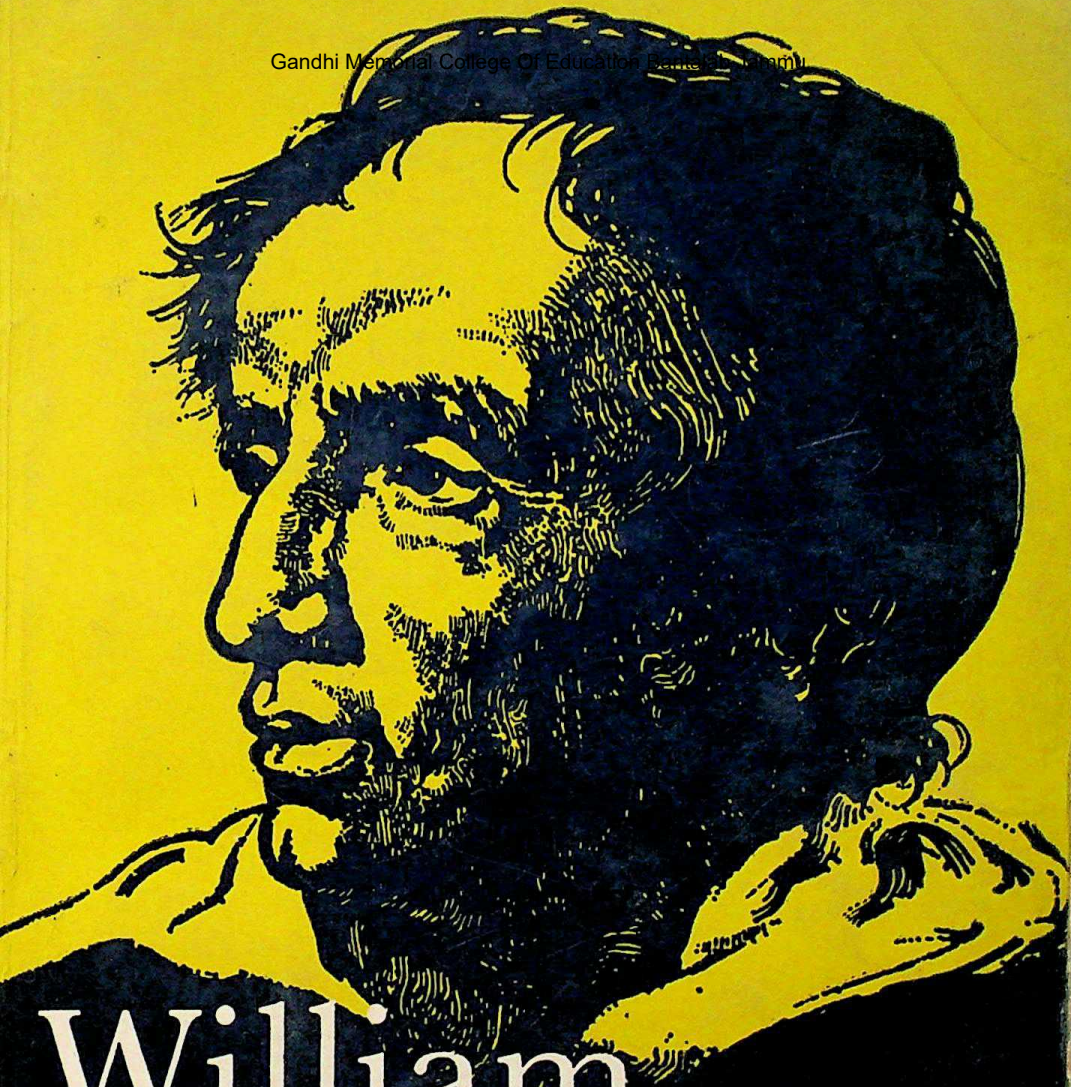




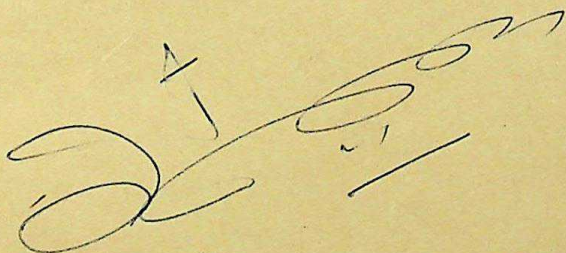
William Wordsworth

AN EVALUATION OF HIS POETRY
s. k. mukherjee

RAMA BROTHERS
N. DELHI-5

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

Predman Krishen Dhar
M.A. (Pol. Sc. Eco. Eng. Hist.) B.Ed.,
Motiyar Rainawari
SRINAGER-190003
KASHMIR

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to be 'Predman Krishen Dhar', written in a cursive style. The signature is located below the printed name and address.

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

WILLIAM WORDSWORTH

AN EVALUATION OF HIS POETRY

[*A Detailed Consideration of Selected
Poems with their Text and Model
Questions with Answers*]

S.K. MUKHERJEE, M.A.

Professor of English
Midnapore College, Midnapore
Formerly, Professor of English
Scottish Church College, Calcutta
Examiner in English
Calcutta University, Calcutta

Edition

Second Revised and Enlarged

1985

G.M. College of Education
Raipur, Bantalab
Jammu.

Acc. No. 2673 (B)
Dated, ... 4/11/2015

RAMA BROTHERS
EDUCATIONAL PUBLISHERS

Bank Street, Karol Bagh

NEW DELHI-110005

© Reserved by the Publishers

[Excluding the Text]

First Edition : 1977

Second Edition : 1985



Published by

Rama Brothers

(Publication Division)

Bank Street, Karol Bagh,

New Delhi-110005

Tele. 567313

Printed at

Mohan Printing Corporation, Padam Nagar

and Skylark Printers, Jama Masjid, Delhi

Preface to the Second Edition

It is a matter of great pleasure for the publishers and author to offer the students the second edition of the book—**William Wordsworth : An Evaluation of His Poetry** in its revised form. Taking into consideration of the various poems prescribed recently in the Syllabi of different universities, it has been brought according to the need of advanced students of English Literature for examination purposes.

Further suggestions for improvement are invited to be duly incorporated in the next edition.

—AUTHOR

Preface to the First Edition

Wordsworth is one of my favourite poets. I fell in love with his poetry in my student life. As a Professor of English I have been lecturing upon his major poems and sonnets since 1962. In the first part of the present book I have given my considered response to Wordsworth ; and so hope to help the reader to a fuller enjoyment and understanding of the experience in and behind his poetry. In the second part of the book I have given close critical analysis of Wordsworth's poems which are known to be widely studied in our universities. I have brought together a selection of the best critical discussions on the major poems of Wordsworth, including many not easily available outside well-established libraries. By giving his attention to the criticism of the best critics, the student can help himself to become a good reader.

I am deeply grateful to Prof. Nishith Ranjan Sen for the loan of his reference books on Romantic poetry. I am also grateful for the help and encouragement I have received from the publishers, Messrs. Rama Brothers of New Delhi.

MIDNAPORE

July, 1977

Sunil Kumar Mukherjee

Contents

PART ONE : THE POET

1.	Wordsworth's Life	...	1
2.	Wordsworth's Poetical Works	...	9
3.	Wordsworth's Poetry of Nature	...	20
4.	Wordsworth's Poetry of Man	...	35
5.	Influences on Wordsworth	...	45
6.	Wordsworth : A General Estimate	...	57
7.	Critics on Wordsworth	...	83

PART TWO : THE PRELUDE—BOOKS I & II

8.	<i>The Prelude—Book I</i> ✓		
	Text of the Poem with Complete Paraphrase	...	98
9.	<i>The Prelude—Book II</i>		
	Text of the Poem with Complete Paraphrase	...	134
10.	Notes	...	162
11.	Critical Estimate of the Poem	...	188
12.	Critical Opinions on the Poem	...	204
13.	Model Questions and Answers		

1. On the basis of your reading of Books I and II of 'The Prelude' discuss the significance of the role assigned to nature in the formation of the poet's character. ... 214
2. What does Wordsworth mean when he says in 'The Prelude' Book I that in his early life he was fostered by the two influences of beauty and fear ?
Illustrate your answer by citing at least one example of each of the two influences.

Or

Both joy and fear played a part in the mental and spiritual growth of Wordsworth in the formative years of boyhood.

Discuss with reference to 'The Prelude' Books I & II.	...	217
3. Consider the merits of 'The Prelude' as a spiritual autobiography.		
Or		
'The Prelude' or growth of a poet's mind. What materials have you found in the poem to justify the alternative title ?		
Or		
Consider the importance of 'The Prelude' for a study of Wordsworth's mind.		
Or		
Discuss 'The Prelude' as an expression of Romantic egotism.	...	202
4. Is it correct to describe 'The Prelude' as an epic poem ? Give reasons for your answer.		
Or		
"In 'The Prelude' Wordsworth was attempting a new kind of epic." Discuss.	...	222
5. "Books I and II of 'The Prelude' deal with Wordsworth's early love of it." Elaborate and illustrate.	...	225
6. According to Wordsworth, it is 'the Mind of Man' that is to be the main region of this song. Examine how this theme is dealt with in 'The Prelude' (Books I and II) ?	...	228
7. "Hard task, vain hope, to analyse the 'The Prelude'.	...	230
8. "'The Prelude' is concerned not with Wordsworth the private person but with the poet's mind." How far is this statement true of the first two books ?		
9. How does Wordsworth account for the overmastering influence of Nature on his development from your reading of 'The Prelude' Books I and II.	...	233
14. Exercises	...	236
15. Select Bibliography	...	238
Appendix	...	240

Detailed Consideration of Selected Poems—with Their Text, Substance, Critical Estimate, Notes and Explanations

16.	<i>Tintern Abbey</i> ✓	...	244
17.	<i>Ode On Intimations of Immortality</i> ✓	...	278
18.	<i>Resolution and Independence</i>	...	309
19.	<i>The Solitary Reaper</i>	...	326
20.	<i>Composed Upon Westminster Bridge</i>	...	332
21.	<i>To Milton (London, 1802)</i>	...	336
22.	<i>The World is Too Much with Us</i>	...	339
23.	<i>A Night-Piece</i>	...	342
24.	<i>It is a Beauteous Evening, Calm and Free</i>	...	347
25.	<i>French Revolution</i>	...	350
26.	<i>Sonnet On Sonnet</i>	...	356
27.	<i>Nuns Fret Not</i>	...	360

Wordsworth's Life

Birth and Parentage

William Wordsworth was born at Cockermouth, in Cumberland, on April 7th, 1770. His father, John Wordsworth, was an attorney-at-law, and law-agent to Sir James Lowther who eventually became the Earl of Lonsdale. His mother was Anne, only daughter of William Cookson, mercer, of Penrith, and of Dorothy, born Crakanthorp, of the ancient family of that name, who from the times of Edward the Third had lived in Newbiggen Hall, Westmoreland. Thus Wordsworth was of pure northern stock. Of the personalities of Wordsworth's parents we know very little. His mother died when he was eight years old, his father when he was fourteen.

Early Life

The time of his infancy and early boyhood was passed partly at Cockermouth, and partly with his mother's parents at Penrith, where his mother, in the year 1778, died of a decline, brought on by a cold, in consequence of being put, at a friend's house in London. As a child Wordsworth was of a moody and violent temper. Indeed, before his mother's death he had already developed peculiarities of character which caused her some anxiety. In the *Autobiographical Memoranda* dictated by Wordsworth at Rydal Mount in 1847, he himself writes, "An intimate friend of hers told me that she once said to her, that the only one of her five children about whose future life she was anxious was William; and he, she said, would be remarkable, either for good or for evil." The cause of this was, that I was of a stiff, moody, and violent temper; so much so that I remember going once into the attics of my grandfather's house at Penrith, upon some indignity having been put upon me, with an intention of destroying myself with one of the foils, which I knew was kept there. I took the foil in hand, but my heart failed."

Education

In 1778, the year of his mother's death, Wordsworth was sent to the Grammar School at Hawkshead, a village at the head of Esthwaite Water. He boarded along with other boys in the cottage of Ann Tyson, an old dame of the village. It was a rough life, entirely lacking in luxury or even comfort, yet the boys could scarcely

have been happier. Wordsworth's own account of his schooldays, in the Autobiographical Memoranda is brief but adequate. He says, "Of my earliest days at school I have little to say, but that they were very happy ones, chiefly because I was left at liberty, then and in the vacations, to read whatever books I liked. For example, I read all Fielding's works, *Don Quixote*, *Gil Blas*, and any part of Swift that I liked; *Gulliver's Travels*, and the *Tale of the Tub*, being both much to my taste. I was very much indebted to one of the ushers of Hawkshead School, by name Shaw, who taught me more of Latin in a fortnight than I had learnt during two preceding years at the school of Cockermouth."

In 1783 John Wordsworth died, leaving the children in the guardianship of their uncles. The uncles discerned the talents of two of them—William and Christopher, and bestowed a Cambridge education on the future Poet Laureate, and the future Master of Trinity. In October, 1787, then, Wordsworth went up to St. John's College, Cambridge. His college career was in one sense an interruption in his education. Having been well taught at Hawkshead Grammar School, he found he did not need to work hard at first, and so fell into what he called 'submissive idleness'. He disliked the petty restrictions of university life, and felt like 'a fowl of the air, ill-tutored for captivity'. He was not much interested in the curriculum, although he made an exception of geometry, a study which, he thought, possessed, like poetry, an unassailable inner truth. He worked little on academic lines, but read widely in literature of his own choosing. Wordsworth spent his first summer vacation at Hawkshead. He felt a new sympathy for the old dame in whose house he still lodged, for 'the quiet woodman in the woods', and even for the 'frank-hearted maids of rocky Cumberland', with whom he now delighted to spend an occasional evening in dancing and country mirth. His second long vacation brought him a further gain in human affections. It was spent in journeying through the Yorkshire dales and the lovely country around Penrith. With him on the tour were his sister Dorothy, of whom he had seen little for some years, and Mary Hutchinson, who afterwards became his wife. His third long vacation he spent in a 'pedestrian tour' through France and Switzerland. It seems probable that Wordsworth and his friend Robert Jones were actually the first undergraduates who ever spent their summer in this way. "Wordsworth and his friend encountered on this tour many a stirring symbol of the expectancy that was running through the nations of Europe."* The two friends came back to England in October, 1790. They probably went straight to Cambridge, and Wordsworth stayed there until early in December. Wordsworth took his B.A. degree on January 27th, 1791, and quitted Cambridge with no fixed intentions as to his future career.

* F.W.H. Myers, *Wordsworth* (Macmillan & Co. Ltd./London, 1912), p. 13.

Residence in London and in France

His uncles now put pressure on him to enter a profession. But Wordsworth could not choose any profession, and for the next four years he drifted, defying his uncles and disappointing his friends. What he did was for his own purpose worth doing, he saw life. He went first to London in the spring of 1791, and lived there for a time on a small allowance and with no definite aim. Here he 'filled an idler's place'; neither the vigorous activity of Londoners nor their ceaseless pursuit of pleasure could lure him away from his own peculiar way of passing the time, which he summed up as

living cheerfully abroad
With unchecked fancy ever on the stir
And all my young affections out of doors.

His relations with London were of a very slight and external kind. He had few acquaintances, and spent by far the larger part of his time wandering about the streets. But his life in London was not unproductive, as two or three noble sonnets and such tender poems as *The Reverie of Poor Susan* testify.

His next step was to go abroad, ostensibly to learn French and fit himself for a private tutorship. In November 1791 Wordsworth landed in France, and went first to Paris, where he visited the Legislative Assembly and the ruins of the Bastille. He passed through revolutionized Paris with satisfaction and sympathy, but with little active emotion, and proceeded first to Orleans, and then to Blois. At Orleans he came in contact with the officers of the army garrisoned there and notably with Beaupuy, an enlightened republican, in politics. Beaupuy's conversation brought to the surface of his mind ideas of freedom under natural law that had been latent in him since childhood. He became fired with Beaupuy's passionate belief in the beneficent change to be brought about by the Revolution. At Blois Wordsworth met and fell in love with Annette Vallon, a French girl belonging to a family with strong Royalist sympathies. He did not marry her, but she bore him a daughter in December 1792.

Years of Perplexity and Disappointment

Wordsworth himself returned to England before his daughter was born. The next few years of his life were very unsettled, and full of unhappy wanderings. In the spring of 1793 his first published works, *An Evening Walk* and *Descriptive Sketches* appeared; but they were poorly received. His desertion of Annette, whatever the reason for it, tormented Wordsworth with remorse. The violent course of events in France rudely shattered his dreams of a new world of liberty and progress. War broke out between France and England, dividing his loyalties in the most agonizing way. It was at this stage in his life that he is said to have been impressed by the ideas of Godwin. He met Godwin, and had talks with him. But he found Godwin's insistence on the ascendancy of Reason over feeling impossible to reconcile with the actuality of life as he knew it. His mental outlook

Handwritten notes:
In France fell in love with Annette Vallon who bore him a daughter in 1792
CC-0 Agamigam Digital Preservation Foundation, Chandigarh. Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

was thoroughly confused, and he yielded up moral questions in despair'. This was Wordsworth's nadir.

Settlement at Racedown

In the autumn of 1795, helped by an unexpected legacy from a friend, Raisley Calvert, whom he had attended in his last illness, Wordsworth settled with his sister at Racedown, near Crewkerne, in Dorsetshire. This was the beginning of a new period in his life. Here, in the first home which he had possessed, Wordsworth finished *Guilt and Sorrow*, a poem gloomy in tone and written mainly in his period of depression, and wrote a tragedy called *The Borderers*, of which only a few lines show any promise of future excellence. He then wrote *The Ruined Cottage*, now incorporated in the First Book of the *Excursion*. This poem, on a subject thoroughly suited to his powers, was his first work of merit. While at Racedown he began to correspond with Coleridge. The two had met briefly in Bristol in August, 1795. The details of their first meeting are lost, but Coleridge had admired Wordsworth's poems before knowing him, and their admiration became mutual very soon. Their preliminary meetings convinced them that closer contact would bring mutual advantage.

Settlement at Alfoxden

In 1797 William and Dorothy moved to Alfoxden in the Quantocks to be near Coleridge who was living with his wife at Nether Stowey. Wordsworth, Dorothy and Coleridge, 'three persons and one soul', lived in the happiest intimacy. Wordsworth and Coleridge had a highly stimulating effect upon each other; their views on literature and politics were similar without being identical, and together they embarked upon a book of poems to defray the expenses of a walking tour to Lynton. This collection of poems, published under the title of *Lyrical Ballads* in 1798, ushered in a new era in English poetry. The volume of *Lyrical Ballads* contained several poems which have been justly blamed for triviality, as *The Thorn*, *Goody Blake*, *The Idiot Boy*; several in which, as in *Simon Lee*, triviality is mingled with much real pathos; and some, as *Expostulation and Reply* and *The Tables Turned*, which are of the very essence of Wordsworth's nature. It ended with *Tintern Abbey* which shows Wordsworth understanding what mattered most in himself. "It is not easy to assess Wordsworth's ballads. They were aggressively and consciously modernistic, and they had the merits and some of them the still greater demerits of most aggressively and consciously modernistic poetry."*

Residence in Germany

As soon as the volume of *Lyrical Ballads* was published, Wordsworth and Dorothy sailed for Hamburg, in the hope that their

* H.M. Margoliouth, *Wordsworth and Coleridge 1795-1834* (Oxford (University Press/London, 1953), p. 36.

imperfect acquaintance with the German language might be improved by the heroic remedy of a winter at Goslar. But at Goslar their progress in learning German was disappointing. "My hope", wrote Wordsworth to Coleridge in February 1799, "was that I should be able to learn German as I learn'd French, in this I have been woefully deceived. I acquired more French in two months than I should acquire German in five years as we have lived." The reason for this failure was really the poverty of the Wordsworths. Goslar was deficient in books; and they were obliged to be content with the few books they had brought with them, which included Burger's poems and Percy's *Reliques*, Coxe's *Travels in Switzerland* in the French edition, and, probably, a Theocritus and a copy of Bartram's *Travels through North and South Carolina*. Most of these books had some part in the output of poetry which was the fruit of these strange, isolated months in the little German town. For, as he said to Coleridge: "As I had no books I have been obliged to write in self-defence." At Goslar he wrote *Lucy Gray*, *Ruth*, *Nutting*, *The Poet's Epitaph*, and other poems known now to most men as possessing in its full fragrance his special charm. And here it was that he planned and began *The Prelude*. "Coleridge's absence, the isolation of his daily life in the little German city, the presence of Dorothy, herself a link with his earliest days, lack of books and outside interests, all alike combined to make his mind a more than usually clear mirror of his own experience. In some such manner, we may conclude, *The Prelude* began to be written."*

Settlement at Grasmere

In December 1799 Wordsworth and Dorothy returned to their beloved Lake country, and settled at Dove Cottage, Grasmere. They were to live permanently in the Lake District from this time on, though they moved from their small cottage to Allan Bank in 1808, and again to Rydal Mount in 1813. The next years were some of the happiest of his life. Wordsworth and Dorothy went to Calais on July 31st, 1802. There, by arrangement, Annette and her daughter were waiting for them, and there, to the astonishment of posterity, the party remained for a whole month. On their return Wordsworth married his cousin, Mary Hutchinson. They were to have five children, two of whom died in infancy. The years at Dove Cottage were the most productive of Wordsworth's life, and it was here that he wrote the greater part of *The Prelude*, the first series of Sonnets dedicated to Liberty, and some of his finest lyric poems, among them the *Ode on Intimations of Immortality*, published in the *Poems in Two Volumes* of 1807.

Later Years

From this time onwards his life, apart from some grievous domestic sorrows, was prosperous and outwardly uneventful. In

* Mary Moorman, *William Wordsworth—A Biography : The Early Years 1770-1803* (Oxford University Press/London, 1957), pp. 421-22.

Born: 1770 } 80 years old -
Died: 1850 }
Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

WILLIAM WORDSWORTH

1813 Wordsworth moved to Rydal Mount, his final home. His financial affairs were eased by the kindness of a rich patron, Sir George Beaumont, by the sale of his poems, and by his appointment in 1813 as Stamp Distributor for Westmorland County. In 1814 he published his longest work, *The Excursion*. Upon this poem Wordsworth's reputation in his lifetime largely rested. In 1815 he published the first collected edition of his poetry. In 1819 he became J.P. for Westmorland. Now he wandered from year to year through Switzerland, Italy, the Netherlands, along the Rhine, in Scotland, Wales, and the Isle of Man. But his life, though apparently peaceful enough, was not without its tragedies: the loss of his brother John in 1805, the early death of two children, the illness of Dorothy, his continual estrangements from the unhappy Coleridge, and finally the unwelcome marriage and death of his daughter Dora, all helped to cloud his later years. On Southey's death in 1843 Wordsworth accepted the Laureateship on the understanding that he was not to be asked to write an 'official' poem. But he never settled down with entire complacency into the role of grand old man of literature.

Death

Wordsworth's last days were absolutely tranquil. A cold caught on a Sunday afternoon walk brought on a pleurisy. He lay for some weeks in a state of passive weakness; and at last on St. George's day in 1850 his spirit passed away. His body was buried, as he had wished, in Grasmere churchyard.

CHRONOLOGY OF WORDSWORTH'S LIFE

- 1770—William Wordsworth, the second son of John Wordsworth (1741-83) and his wife Anne (1748-78), born at Cockermouth, Cumberland, April 7.
- 1775 (?)—Attends Anne Birkett's infant school at Penrith, Westmorland, while staying with his mother's parents at their mercers' shop there.
- 1776—Dayboy at Cockermouth Grammar School at least until October and may have attended intermittently for two full years. (Much of this time certainly spent with Coakson grandparents at Penrith.)
- 1778-87—At Hawkshead Grammar School. His mother dies, 1778; his father, 1783.
- 1787-91—At St. John's College, Cambridge.
- 1790—First visit to France: Paris (November), Orleans, Blois, Paris (October).
- 1793—*An Evening Walk* and *Descriptive Sketches* published. Walking tour by Salisbury, Stonehenge, Bristol, and Tintern Abbey to Wales.
- 1795—Settles with his sister Dorothy at Racedown, Dorset. Meets Coleridge.

- 1797—Visits Coleridge at Nether Stowey, Somerset ; leaves Race-down and settles at Alfoxden, near Nether Stowey.
- 1798—*Lyrical Ballads* (September). Visit to Germany (September 1798-April 1799).
- 1799—Settles at Dove Cottage, Townend, Grasmere (his home till 1808).
- 1802—Visit to Calais (August). Marries Mary Hutchinson at Brompton, near Scarborough, October 4.
- 1803—First tour in Scotland. Meets Walter Scott.
- 1805—His sailor brother John drowned at sea.
- 1806—Lives at Coleorton, Leicestershire, from October 1806 to the summer of 1807.
- 1807—*Poems in Two Volumes*.
- 1808—Moves from Dove Cottage to Allan Bank, Grasmere (his home till 1811).
- 1809—*The Convention to Cintra*.
- 1811—Moves from Allan Bank to the Rectory, Grasmere (his home till 1813).—
- 1812—Death of two of his children.
- 1813—Settles at Rydal Mount, his home for the rest of his life. Appointed Stamp Distributor for Westmorland.
- 1814—Second tour in Scotland. *The Excursion*.
- 1815—*Poems*, two vols. (first collected edition). *The White Doe of Rylstone* (begun 1807).
- 1816—*A Letter to a Friend of Robert Burns*. *Thanksgiving Ode*.
- 1818—*Two Addresses to the Freeholders of Westmorland*.
- 1819—*Peter Bell* (written 1798). *The Waggoner* (written 1805).
- 1820—*The River Duddon, a Series of Sonnets*. *Miscellaneous Poems*, four volumes (second collected edition, revised). *The Excursion* (second edition, revised). Fifth visit to the Continent : Switzerland, the Italian Lakes, Paris (July-November).
- 1822—*Memorials of a Tour on the Continent, 1820*. *Ecclesiastical Sketches* (called *Sonnets* in 1837).
- 1823—Sixth visit to the Continent : tour in the Netherlands.
- 1827—*Poetical Works*, five volumes (third collected edition, revised).
- 1828—Seventh visit to the Continent : tour up the Rhine.
- 1829—Tour in Ireland.
- 1830—Rides from Lancaster to Cambridge, 'a solitary equestrian'.
- 1831—Third tour in Scotland : visits Scott at Abbotsford.
- 1832—*Poetical Works*, four volumes (fourth collected edition, revised).

- 1835—*Yarrow Revisited, and other Poems. A Guide through the District of the Lakes in the North of England.*
- 1836-37—*Poetical Works*, six volumes (fifth collected edition, revised).
- 1838—*The Sonnets of William Wordsworth, collected in one volume.*
- 1841—Revisits Alfoxden and Tintern.
- 1842—*Poems, chiefly of Early and Late Years* (called 'Volume VII'). Resigns post of Stamp-Distributor for Westmorland ; receives a pension of £300 from the Civil List.
- 1843—Appointed Poet Laureate in succession to Southey. Dictates notes on his poems to Miss Fenwick.
- 1844—*Kendal and Windermere Railway : Two Letters reprinted from the Morning Post.*
- 1845—*Poems*, one volume (sixth collected edition, revised).
- 1847—*Ode, performed in the Senate-House, Cambridge.*
- 1849-50—*Poetical Works*, six volumes, giving his final revision of the text.
- 1850—Dies at Rydal Mount (April 23). *The Prelude* (begun 1799 completed 1805, revised 1839, published posthumously).

Wordsworth's Poetical Works

Introduction

Wordsworth was a prolific writer. His poetic career covers a period of more than sixty years ; and so far as the bulk of his poetry is concerned, few poets can challenge comparison with him. Wordsworth's poetic career may be divided into four periods : the early period, the period of gloom, the glorious decade, and the period of decline.

The Early Period

Wordsworth's poetic life began, he would tell us, on the banks of the Derwent in Cockermouth, when he was a child in arms :

Was it for this,*
That one the fairest of all rivers loved
To blend his murmurs with my nurse's song ?

It began consciously in the Vale of Esthwaite when he attended Hawkshead School. As a school boy he was encouraged by his teachers in the writing of English verse, for which he showed a natural talent. Wordsworth himself has given a precise account of his youthful verse : "It may be, perhaps, as well to mention, that the first verses which I wrote were a task imposed by my master ; the subject, *The Summer Vacation* ; and of my own accord I added others upon *Return to School*. There was nothing remarkable in either poem ; but I was called upon, among other scholars, to write verses upon the completion of the second centenary from the foundation of the school in 1585 by Archbishop Sandys. These verses were much admired—far more than they deserved, for they were but a tame imitation of Pope's versification, and a little in his style."

One of his youthful poems stands out : he calls it *The Vale of Esthwaite* and describes it as 'a long poem running on my own adventures and the scenery of the country in which I was brought up'. *The Vale of Esthwaite* ran into many hundreds of lines. Most of it survives in two note-books out of which many pages have been

* Was it for this (that is—to fail to make me a poet)

torn, so that the text, as Selincourt has skilfully reconstructed it, is still fragmentary. His subject-matter is of two kinds: first the romantic stuff of Beattie's *Minstrel*—

There would be dream of graves, and corse pale,
And ghosts that to the charnel dungeon throng,
And drag a length of clanking chains, and wail—

and, second, scenes and incidents in Wordsworth's own life. "The poem makes strange reading. Page after page in the poet's rapid youthful hand is filled with Gothic scenery, haunted castles with their wailing spectres, shrouded in mist or lit by gleams of moonlight, dark woods, and dreary moors. But from time to time we suddenly emerge into daylight:

And see the mist, as warms the day,
From the green vale steals away,
Yet round the mountain-top it sails
Slow borne upon the dewy gales,
And on yon summit brown and bare,
That seems an island in the air,
The shepherd's restless dog I mark
Who, bounding round with frequent bark,
Now leaps around the uncovered plain,
Now dives into the mist again.

This is Wordsworth, unmistakably. The images are true and clear: Wordsworth's keen eye is on his object. He treats the same incident of the shepherd and his dog in *An Evening Walk*, and again, but no better, in *The Prelude*.*

When *The Vale of Esthwaite* is compared with *An Evening Walk*, written only a year or two later, we find that the 'gothic' passages have been dropped and the pictures of landscapes and rural incidents retained and added to by many hundreds more, described with all the accuracy possible in a style that still clung to the politest classical models. Of *An Evening Walk* Wordsworth said, "There is not an image in it which I have not observed, and now in my 73rd year I recollect the time and place where most of them were noticed." Coleridge justly praised its 'fine balance of truth in observing with the imaginative faculty of modifying the objects observed'. But there is something more than that in it. The most striking passage in *An Evening Walk*—more striking in the original edition of 1793 than in the later version—is the poignant description of the starving widow and orphans of the soldier who lies

Asleep on Bunker's charnel hill afar.

An Evening Walk was probably written as a careful full-dress version in heroic couplets of the earlier easy-going octosyllabics of *The Vale of Esthwaite*. But Wordsworth here mistook his way. The

* Helen Darbishire, *The Poet Wordsworth* (O.U.P./London, 1950), pp. 14-15.

octosyllabics had a glorious tradition; they had the best possible progenitor in Milton's *L'Allegro*. But in *An Evening Walk* Wordsworth was, as he saw later, 'under the injurious influence of Erasmus Darwin's dazzling manner'. In both the poems Wordsworth is under literary influence, but the earlier poem is more Wordsworthian than the later.

Descriptive Sketches was written in France in the late summer and autumn of 1792. It commemorates a walking tour in the Alps in the summer of 1790. "In *Descriptive Sketches* he (Wordsworth) gave, in the formal style and metre of *An Evening Walk* and with even more literary borrowings and fewer passages of intimate observation and truth of detail, a rather patchy picture of his wanderings, interspersed with romantically conceived descriptions of Swiss chalet-dwellers, and ending with a fierce political panegyric in praise of revolutionary France. It does not in any way reflect the real mood and spirit of the walk, for it affects to represent him in a melancholy frame of mind, whereas it is clear from his letter to Dorothy written from Switzerland, and from his references to the walking tour in later life, as well as from the account of his spirits in *The Prelude*, that although occasionally subject to fits of melancholy, Wordsworth never enjoyed any experience more. All that can be said for *Descriptive Sketches* as a record of the tour is that it mentions and describes rather more places than are treated in *The Prelude*, though it sometimes alters the order in which they were visited. Poetically it is weak and stilted in style, though it contains some phrases which he rightly thought worthy of being used again in *The Prelude*—'the torrents shooting from the clear blue sky', for instance, and the 'black, drizzling crags'. Human types, such as the 'Grison gypsy' and the chamois-hunter are introduced as foreground figures in the landscape, to heighten the romantic effect, much as the Beggar-woman and her children are introduced into *An Evening Walk*."*

Even if Wordsworth had never gone on to write anything else, he would still have a place as the writer of *An Evening Walk* and *Descriptive Sketches*, his earliest published poems, which came out in 1793, five years before the *Lyrical Ballads*. Although there is nothing original or revolutionary about these poems, they are very good of their kind. Legouis rightly observes: "Of the young man's passion for nature, his early poems, both published in 1793, furnish direct proof. They are the most minute and copious inventories of the aspects he saw, of the noises he heard, in his native lakes (*An Evening Walk*) or in his wanderings through Switzerland (*Descriptive Sketches*). Such acuteness and copiousness of observation were only possible in the case of a devotee. However contorted and knotty the verse may be, however artificial the diction, the poet's fervour is as manifest here as in the most eloquent of his subsequent effusions.

* Mary Moorman, *William Wordsworth: The Early Years 1770-1803* (Oxford University Press/London, 1957), pp. 128-29.

Though he follows in the train of a succession of descriptive poets, he outdoes them all in abundance of precise touches."

The Period of Gloom

The poems of this period (1792-1797) bear the marks of the poet's tortured state of mind. Wordsworth's state of mind at this time is clearly reflected in that remarkable poem, *Guilt and Sorrow*. It is a story of cruel wrongs suffered by an innocent woman, chiefly as the result of war, and by a technically guilty but essentially good man, who ends on the gallows as a confessed murderer. Two victims of social injustice meet in darkness and cold on Salisbury Plain; one a sailor, a pressed man, who, defrauded of his prize-money, has robbed and murdered a traveller; the other a female vagrant whose soldier-husband and children have all died in the West Indies. The two shelter from the storm, and the woman narrates her story to the man. When the storm has abated, the two make their way together to a country inn, where they are warmly received. While they are there, a country cart arrives, in which lies a woman in the last stages of consumption. This woman explains the circumstances under which she has been driven from her home. A traveller had been found murdered hard by, and suspicion of the crime had fallen upon her absent sailor-husband, who had been seen, it was alleged, in the neighbourhood. She protests his innocence, knowing him to be the gentlest of men, so mild that he would not rob a bird of its food. Recognition follows, and the husband implores his wife's forgiveness. The wife is by now past speech, but forgives him and dies. The husband at once surrenders himself to justice, and is hanged.

Of *Guilt and Sorrow* Wordsworth said: "Its object is partly to expose the vices of the penal law and the calamities of War as they affect individuals." It is a thoroughly Godwinian story. The first volume of *Political Justice* contains some bitter sentences which Wordsworth could appropriately have prefixed to this poem as an indication of its general intention. "Let us survey", says Godwin, "the poor, oppressed, hungry, naked.....man writhing under disease or the fiercer tortures stored up for him by his brethren.....Let us plunge into the depths of dungeons." And then, a characteristically Godwinish touch, "the evil does not consist merely in the pain endured. It is the injustice which inflicts it that gives it its sharpest sting."

This poem is a distinctively morbid attack upon the whole social order, produced under the influence of Godwinism. As Garrod puts it: "It is morbid in its execution; morbid even where real and lively in detail. In its fundamental conception I take it to be, not only unreal, but immoral. It is merely not true. If great crimes and great virtues proceed from one source, if the good man is even more liable than the bad man to bad actions and bad passions, then are we, of all creatures, not only the most miserable, but the most uninteresting. The salt of human drama loses its savour, and what

was tragic ceases, in becoming meaningless, to be moving." It is in the Spenserian stanza, the style much plainer than that of the two earlier poems, strangely impressive, but flat with the flatness of despair.

The Borderers is, like *Guilt and Sorrow*, a study in some problems of criminal psychology. A perfectly good man, 'the pleasure of all hearts', and enjoying the love of a good woman, took ship to Syria in the reign of Henry III. The crew persuaded him, quite falsely, that the captain was guilty of a plot against his honour. He accordingly lands the captain on a desert shore, leaving him there to starve to death. So far so good. Later, in England, he meets a man, the counterpart of himself, a perfectly good man, 'the pleasure of all hearts', enjoying the love of a good woman. He conceives the strange idea of re-creating in this counterpart of himself his own fate. Attaching himself, accordingly, to the company of *Borderers* commanded by his counterpart, and winning the leader's confidence and affection, he proceeds to poison his mind with suspicions of the father of the girl whom he loves, an old, and blind, and utterly virtuous man. By playing upon his imagination he finally succeeds in persuading him to kill the old man : who is conducted to a desert spot and there left to starve. He is then slain by the other *Borderers*, and his counterpart, the virtuous chief of the *Borderers*, sets out upon a solitary life of wandering penance.

Swinburne has spoken of the plot of *The Borderers* as characterized by a 'morbid and monstrous extravagance of horrible impossibility'. The play is built out of an essentially Godwinian idea : the morbid tortuosity, the unnatural perversion of its plot, turns upon a ground conception patently Godwinian, and that is, after all, the head and front of Swinburne's attack. As a tragedy *The Borderers* is quite unactable, almost unreadable ; but it is shot through with gleams of poetic feeling and beauty that show how Wordsworth was advancing, as he wrote, towards his true vocation as the poet of Nature and man.

By far the most important poem completed during this period was that which he called *The Ruined Cottage*, and which after many alterations and additions became the first book of *The Excursion*. When he wrote *The Ruined Cottage*, Wordsworth had emerged from the state of depression and could look objectively at the things of which he desired to treat. This objectivity he secured in the poem by the device of introducing a narrator other than himself to tell the story of Margaret. This was the Pedlar—a kindly, gentle, detached observer, and a lover of the country-side through which he trod his endless rounds.

The Ruined Cottage is a story of poverty, sorrow, and death. War and unemployment are again the background of Margaret's personal tragedy. But it is told without bitterness or exaggeration. Pity and sympathy are the emotions which the poet wants to evoke ; and the whole story is made lovely and vivid by the wealth of detail

about the cottage, and its gradual decline from cheerful prosperity to complete ruin. It is a tragic poem; yet the effect is not flat despair; the torturing hope that endears her cottage to Margaret 'shares the nature of infinity'. "The style is simple, though not with the aggressive simplicity of the *Lyrical Ballads*, austere but not homely, forecasting the style that Wordsworth made his own in *Michael*, and heightened to statelier effects in *Tintern Abbey*."*

Thus much Wordsworth had written by 1797, but only *An Evening Walk* and *Descriptive Sketches* had been published. These early poems have one quality in common: they are solid, the product of direct observation of Nature and human life.

The Great Decade

Wordsworth wrote his best poems during the glorious decade from 1797 to 1807. The volume of *Lyrical Ballads* was published in the autumn of 1798. Apart from some pieces of earlier date, including a long extract from *Guilt and Sorrow*, Wordsworth's contribution to the volume consisted chiefly of lyrical ballads properly so called; but to these he added four delightful lyrics—*It is the first mild day of March, I heard a thousand blended notes*, *Expostulation and Reply*, *The Tables Turned*, and a long poem written, to use Coleridge's words, 'in his own character, in the impassioned, lofty and sustained diction which is characteristic of his genius', namely the *Lines Written above Tintern Abbey*, the medium of which is neither ballad nor lyric, but an elevated blank verse. It is not of course possible to divide the poems in the *Lyrical Ballads* into two neat groups—ballads and lyrics; the very title of the collection proves this. Basically, a ballad is a simple poem with a story, told in a popular fashion, whereas a lyric is a short poem of personal feeling. None of the poems is a mere list of events, and none of them is an outpouring of vague, highly-coloured feeling. However, most of them show some leanings towards one form or the other; in some, like *The Idiot Boy*, the narrative is predominant, whereas in many of the poems which were written after 1798 there is hardly any story at all. The ballads are not landscape poetry. Most of them are about ordinary people and poor people with names like Michael and Susan and Simon Lee.

The language of Wordsworth's poems included in the *Lyrical Ballads* is simple, not poetic, artificial or grandiose. Most of the words are in everyday use even today, and many of the poems, like traditional ballads, are made or partly made of conversation. Most of the objects mentioned are homely, and they are called by their homely names. For example, in the following extract from *The Thorn* there is not one word that is hard to understand, and the only figure of speech is a simile comparing one ordinary object to another:

* Herbert Grierson & J.C. Smith, *A Critical History of English Poetry* (Penguin Books Ltd./Harmondsworth, England, 1966), p. 295.

There is a Thorn—it looks so old,
 In truth, you'd find it hard to say
 How it could ever have been young,
 It looks so old and grey.
 Not higher than a two years' child
 It stands erect, this aged Thorn...

The heroic couplet has gone. Some of the poems are in blank verse, but most of them are in very simple ballad stanzas, with short lines and simple rhymes. This is the kind of verse :

We walked along, while bright and red
 Uprose the morning sun ;
 And Matthew stopped, he looked, and said
 'The will of God be done' !

Peter Bell was composed in 1798, the year of the *Lyrical Ballads*, though in deference to Lamb's judgement it was withheld from publication till 1819. This extraordinary poem is Wordsworth's reply or rival to *The Ancient Mariner*. Like *The Ancient Mariner*, it is the story of the redemption of a human soul. But, whereas, the Mariner, for the one sin of his pride and callousness in shooting the albatross suffers adventures and 'spectral persecutions' that must set him apart among men for ever, *Peter Bell* is a hardened ruffian who is at last frightened into becoming 'a good and honest man' by a process of purely natural visitations—the instruments of his salvation being a dead man, an ass, a little boy, a withered leaf, a woman, and finally some Methodist hymn-singers. Like Masefield's *The Everlasting Mercy*, *Peter Bell* is a study in the psychology of conversion. As such it is very interesting; but it is also a testament to Wordsworth's central faith that Nature is capable of influencing for good even one of her more rebellious and insensitive children. For *Peter Bell* is the very opposite of Wordsworth's other heroes up to this time, the Sailor, the Pedlar, or Marmaduke.

Into *Peter Bell* Wordsworth wove many memories and everyday incidents, from the donkeys who roamed in the woods at Alfoxden and who, he said, 'put him upon writing the poem', to the drowned man raised out of the water 'like a ghost'. But it is not sufficiently informed with feeling to be good poetry. As Grierson and Smith say, "Wordsworth was so bent on teaching, on tracing, as he put it, 'the manner in which we associate ideas in a state of excitement', that he sometimes forgot in practice the maxim which he acknowledged in theory, that Poesy only instructs as it delights. *Peter Bell* does not delight."

Perhaps the *Lucy* poems are the most famous of Wordsworth's early lyrics. Most of them were composed while the poet was abroad with his sister in Germany, during the bitterly cold winter of 1799. "In them we see for the first time certain qualities that were to become more and more common in Wordsworth's later poems. The most noticeable of these qualities in a new tone of tender personal

emotion, at its best pure and strong, and at its worst dangerously near sentimentality. It is a quite different emotion from the sense of social, human sympathy with the general lot of men which underlies poems like *The Idiot Boy*, the *Female Vagrant*, the *Last of the Flock* and so on. With this new tone comes a whole new set of images and references, dealing with flowers, birds, stars and the smaller, prettier details of nature. The *Lucy* poems are not 'nature poems', as some of his later poems are nature poems, but they do point the way towards later works like *The Daisy*, *The Celandine*, *The Cuckoo* and *The Daffodils*."*

The identity of Lucy has been the problem of critics for many years. But Wordsworth is a poet before he is a biographer, and neither Lucy nor her home nor his relations with her are necessarily in the strict sense historical. Nevertheless, as all the poems in the *Lyrical Ballads* were 'founded on fact' in some way, and as Wordsworth's mind was essentially factual, it would be rash to say that Lucy is entirely fictitious. It is generally supposed that Dorothy is the inspiration of these poems. The poems are closely connected in many ways with the identity of Dorothy, who is quite certainly the subject of one of them (*Strange Fits of Passion*), and so possibly of all.

Lucy Gray, a poem slightly different from the other *Lucy* lyrics, was the offspring of the snow-bound landscape around him, and of Dorothy's memories of a real incident of her own childhood at Halifax. Echoes of his old favourite *The Babes in the Wood* sound in it for he had with him a copy of Percy's *Reliques*. This poem has an unearthly, unreal quality, as though in it the poet were trying to say something personal and complicated about himself, not something about a little girl called Lucy Gray. The last verses of the poem contain a touch of the supernatural, which is quite foreign to the earlier ballads.

Wordsworth began to write *The Prelude* as early as 1799, and certain passages from it, such as *There was a Boy* and *Nutting*, were originally published along with the *Lyrical Ballads*. Most of the rest of this long work was composed over the years 1800—1805. Wordsworth had finished one version of it by 1805, but it was not published until after his death in 1850. Perhaps the first most important point to get straight about *The Prelude* is to decide what it is not. It is not a simple account of Wordsworth's life. Its subtitle—"The Growth of a Poet's Mind"—shows that the poet was not interested merely in facts. "*The Prelude* can only be called subjective autobiography. It is written, as it were, from the inside outwards. The frame of reference, that is, round which it is organized, lies deep down in Wordsworth's mind. The names, dates and places, that occur in it, and give an illusion of objective autobiography, are really subordinate to a private calendar and a geography of Words-

* Margaret Drabble, *Wordsworth* (Evans Brothers Ltd./London, 1968), p. 64.

worth's own that has only an indirect relationship to the time and space of the world as we know it."*

In form and structure, *The Prelude* is a peculiar and individual work. At times it resembles an epistle, or verse-letter, a form of poem popular in the eighteenth century, and much used by Pope. However, it is far longer than the usual epistle, and at times Wordsworth seems to forget Coleridge's existence entirely, and to write entirely for himself or for the general reader. In other ways it resembles an epic. It has noticeable similarities to the most famous of English epics, *Paradise Lost*. But it differs from the true epic in that it has no real story. It has no hero, and it is not directly concerned with outward events, though they play their part; its action takes place not in the outside world but in the poet's mind. As a form, as a type of poem, *The Prelude* forms a class by itself. There is nothing quite like it.

Wordsworth's next major publication was the *Poems in Two Volumes of 1807*. This collection contains, besides the sonnets on *National Independence and Liberty*, and the *Memorials of a Tour in Scotland*, such masterpieces as *Resolution and Independence*, *The Affliction of Margaret*, the *Ode to Duty*, the *Elegiac Stanzas suggested by a picture of Peele Castle*, *The Happy Warrior*, the *Immortality Ode*, and the *Song at the Feast of Brougham Castle*—poems on loftier themes and in a more elevated style than the simple lyrics and plain pastorals of 1801. It also contains beautiful flowerpieces like *The Daffodils*, *To the Daisy*, and *To the Celandine*.

There is a group of poems, written while he was still at the height of his powers, which seem to forecast his approaching decline, and which are full of evidence that he knew what was happening to himself as a poet; they are all remarkably similar in feeling if not in actual meaning. They are poems written not with joy, nor about joy, but about the loss of joy. They are poems about the problem of living without joy. The most important poems in this group are *Resolution and Independence* (written 1802, published 1807), *Ode to Duty* (written 1804, published 1807), *Immortality Ode* (written over a few years, probably 1802-4, and published 1807), and *Elegiac Stanzas suggested by a picture of Peele Castle in a Storm* (written 1805, published 1807). These poems, different as they are, all share a certain stiff determination to make the best of things, to carry on without complaining, and they all lament the loss of the easy spontaneous joys and passions of early youth.

The last of this group of poems about resignation is different from the others in that it was written not about a vague sense of growing old and loss, but about a specific tragedy. It was written in 1805, as an elegy for Wordsworth's brother John who had died that year when his ship was lost at sea. There is, in the last line of this

* F.W. Bateson, *Wordsworth—A Re-interpretation* (Longmans, Green & Co. (London, 1954), p. 165.

poem, something like a note of Christian hope. From this time on, Wordsworth, who had never been an orthodox Christian, was to become a church-goer. This poem gives the first hints of his final total conversion and commitment.

The Period of Decline

After 1807 Wordsworth's poetic powers began to decline. "The psycho-analysts tell us that this decline was the nemesis of repressed passion. We doubt it. Wordsworth's passion for Annette troubled the surface of his mind for some years, but not its depths. The nightmares that afflicted him continually for years after his return from France came not from repressed passion but from remembered terrors. The proximate cause of the withering of his genius, we believe, was overwork."*

The *magnum opus* of this period of decline was, of course, *The Excursion*. Apart from Book I (which is simply a revised version of *The Ruined Cottage*) and Book II (written in the summer of 1806), most of the poem was composed between 1809 and 1813. It was published in 1814. *The Excursion* is a disconcerting great poem. It contains passages as good, or nearly as good, as the best of *The Prelude*. But apart from Book I the great poetic passages of *The Excursion* suffer from their somewhat prosaic contexts. The framework of the whole poem, a series of only very faintly dramatic speeches by the Wanderer, the Solitary and the Pastor, serves well for didactic discourse—Professor Muirhead called it 'one of the finest ethical discourses in the world'—but not so well for poetic revelation.

"*The Excursion* fails on two scores: it fails because it has no convincing structure, no visual or allegorical unity: and it fails because it has not sufficient verbal harmony or felicity to justify it in any less unified conception. Poetry has two modes of beauty: the dramatic or visual, and the verbal or aural; the highest poetry unites both; great poetry can be sustained on one of them; Wordsworth, in the *Excursion*, perseveres in neither."** It was *The Excursion*, however, which established Wordsworth's reputation as an important poet to his contemporaries; ironically, as is so often the case, he began to receive widespread recognition just as his poetic powers began to decline.

At the end of 1814 Wordsworth wrote two remarkable poems—*Laodamia* and *Dion*—in a new style, a classic style suggested by his re-reading of Virgil. In *Laodamia*, Wordsworth embarks, not without effort, upon the poetry of myth which he had once renounced for the more awful Erebus of reality. Yet even here, as in the kindred and not less beautiful *Dion*, there is no frank self-abandonment

* Herbert Grierson & J.C. Smith, *A Critical History of English Poetry* (Penguin Books Ltd./Harmondsworth, England, 1966), p. 305.

** Herbert Read, *Wordsworth* (Faber and Faber Ltd./London, 1949), p. 156.

WORDSWORTH'S POETICAL WORKS

19

to the genius of classic myth. "The story of Laodamia was suggested to him by the sympathetic 'interchange of growth and blight' in the trees that grew out of Protesilaus' grave. And the story of Dion resumes the mood of the *White Doe* as a picture of one of those 'gracious openings' out of suffering into a region of blessed consolation, which Wordsworth descends into the turmoil of history only to disclose. Dion's assassination is his benign release from the perplexities of the crowned idealist."*

After 1814 the decline in Wordsworth's poetic powers is undeniable. He still wrote many poems, but he attempted no sustained flights. Instead we have 'Memorials' of his various tours, and sonnet-sequences—three long series of *Ecclesiastical Sonnets*, a series on the River Duddon, another on the punishment of death. However, Wordsworth's fire was never quite extinguished till long after 1814. When he was deeply moved he could write as well as ever. As late as 1817, when he was forty-seven, he could still write a poem quite passionate in its regret for lost power: this poem *Composed on an Evening of Extraordinary Splendour and Beauty*, is well worth looking at for proof that Wordsworth was not blissfully unaware of his fading talent. Although the language of most of it is horribly poetic in a bad sense—full of lines like 'Thine is the tranquil hour, purpureal Eve'—the passion shines through the artificiality of the words. The great voice is heard for the last time in the *Effusion on the Death of James Hogg*:

Like clouds that rake the mountain summits,
Or waves that own no curbing hand,
How fast has brother followed brother
From sunshine to the sunless land.

Conclusion

"Beyond *The Excursion* we need hardly follow him. At this point his ideas were formed and settled. His best poetry had been a product of their development: now that the development is complete the poetry almost stops. Wordsworth wrote a great many verses after 1815, and was to live for forty years more, a serene and well-organized existence: but apart from some repetition of earlier lyric themes, and occasional fine sonnets, there is nothing in the remainder of his work that we could not well spare."**

If Wordsworth had died young, as Shelley, Byron and Keats did, we would have had a very different picture of him today; but he survived, and we have to try to understand the older man without forgetting our admiration for the younger one.

* C.H. Herford, *The Age of Wordsworth* (G. Bell & Sons Ltd./London, 1939), p. 164.

** Graham Hough, *The Romantic Poets* (Arrow Books Ltd./London, 1961), p. 92.

3

*Wordsworth's Poetry of Nature***Introduction**

Wordsworth's passion for Nature is well known. As De Quincey puts it : "Wordsworth had his passion for Nature fixed in his blood. It was a necessity of his being, like that of a mulberry leaf to the silkworm, and through his commerce with Nature did he live and breathe." Wordsworth loves all objects of Nature ; but he is concerned far less with the sensuous manifestations that delight most of the poets of Nature, than with the spiritual that he finds underlying these manifestations. The divinization of Nature, which began in the modern world at the Renaissance and proceeded during the eighteenth century, culminates for English literature in Wordsworth. "It was Wordsworth's aim as a poet to seek for beauty in meadow, woodland, and the mountain top, and to interpret this beauty in spiritual terms."*

Distinguished from other Poets of Nature

Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, Keats, Shelley, were all poets of Nature, but in what different ways. "Coleridge, sympathising as he does intellectually with his friend's transcendentalism, is far more readily influenced by the multifold sensuous appeal of Nature ; while Byron and Keats delight with a frankly pagan joy in landscape, waterscape, and cloudscape, and are content to worship the goddess, not to consult the oracle."** The poet whose attitude towards Nature approaches nearest to Wordsworth's is Shelley. They have this point in common. They, unlike their contemporaries, intellectualized Nature. They are not merely poets of Nature, they are prophets of Nature ; they are concerned less to marvel at its beauty than to exult at its inner significance. But there is this great difference : with Wordsworth Nature is 'both law and impulse' ; with

* Arthur Compton-Rickett, *A History of English Literature* (Thomas Nelson & Sons Ltd/London, 1963), p. 308.

** Arthur Compton-Rickett, *A History of English Literature* (Thomas Nelson & Sons Ltd/London, 1963), p. 309.

Shelley, it is 'impulse' alone. Again, for Wordsworth, Nature is one; for Shelley it is virtually many; and in this respect Wordsworth resembles the old type of the stern, self-controlled, law-abiding Jew, with his reverent worship of the one Jehovah; while Shelley is the passionate, sensuous, lawless Gentile, with his free, familiar worship of 'gods many and lords many'. And from this fundamental difference between Shelley and Wordsworth there arises inevitably another, viz., that Shelley, in viewing Nature, perceived only that which appealed vividly to his sensuous self, as the brilliancy of the morning star or the tumultuous harmonies of the wind. He had no eyes, as Wordsworth had, for the homely and the commonplace.

Growth and Development of his Love for Nature

In poems like *Tintern Abbey* and *The Prelude* Wordsworth has shown how his love of Nature was developed and the various stages through which it passed.

Wordsworth's childhood days were spent in the midst of beautiful sights and sounds of Nature. The child Wordsworth looked upon Nature as a source of and scene for animal pleasure like skating, riding, fishing and walking. Wordsworth's first love of Nature was a healthy boy's delight in outdoor life. In *Tintern Abbey* he refers to the 'glad animal movements' of his childhood days. In *The Prelude* he says that in this early stage Nature was

But secondary to my own pursuits
And animal activities, and all
Their trivial pleasures.

In the second stage Wordsworth developed a passion for the sensuous beauty of Nature. As he grew up, his 'coarser pleasures' lost their charm for him, and Nature was loved with an unreflecting passion altogether untouched by intellectual interests or associations. Referring to the boyish pleasures of the period when he viewed Nature with a purely physical passion, he writes in *The Prelude*,

The props of my affections were removed,
And yet the building stood, as if sustained
By its own spirit ! All that I behold
Was dear, and hence to finer influxes
The mind lay open to a more exact
And close communion.

In *Tintern Abbey* he describes how during this period Nature became the object of a passion for the picturesque :

I cannot paint
What then I was. The sounding cataract
Haunted me like a passion : the tall rock,
The mountain, and the deep and gloomy wood,
Their colours and their forms, were then to me
An appetite ; a feeling and a love,
That had no need of a remoter charm,

*During French Revolution
his love of nature became
linked with the love of man*

By thought supplied, nor any interest
Unborrowed from the eye.

All these aching joys and dizzy raptures came to an end with his experiences of human suffering in France. The French Revolution opened his eyes and made him realize the dignity of the common man. During this period his love of Nature became linked with the love of man. Now he could hear in Nature

The still, sad music of humanity,
Nor harsh nor grating, though of ample power
To chasten and subdue.

Referring to this stage of human-heartedness, the poet writes in *Ode on Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood*,

I love the Brooks which down their channels fret
Even more than when I tripped lightly as they ;
The innocent brightness of a new-born Day
Is lovely yet ;
The Clouds that gather round the setting sun
Do take a sober colouring from an eye
That hath kept watch o'er man's mortality ;
Another race hath been, and other palms are won.

*Spiritual
Interpretation
of Nature*

But this stage was soon followed by the final stage of the spiritual interpretation of Nature. In the poem *Nutting* Wordsworth describes the circumstances under which a great change came in his approach to Nature. After his 'merciless ravage', something mysterious touched him, and he felt that 'there is a spirit in the woods'. From now onwards he realized a divine principle reigning in the heart of Nature. As Warwick James puts it : "At this stage the foundation of Wordsworth's entire existence was his mode of seeing God in Nature and Nature in God." This is known as the stage of Pantheism. This faith of the poet that the Eternal Spirit pervades all the objects of Nature is forcefully expressed in *Tintern Abbey* where he says,

And I have felt
A presence that disturbs me with the joy
Of elevated thoughts ; a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused,
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
And the round ocean and the living air,
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man :
A motion and a spirit, that impels
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
And rolls through all things.

Nature-descriptions

Innumerable passages of Nature-description are scattered in Wordsworth's poems. These passages contain marvellous descriptions of different aspects of Nature. In *The Prelude* he compares

himself to an Aeolian harp which answers with harmony to every touch of the wind. The figure is very accurate because there is hardly a sight or a sound from a violet to a mountain and from a bird-note to the thunder of the cataract that is not reflected in some beautiful way in Wordsworth's poetry. In most of his poems Wordsworth has given delicate and subtle expression to the sheer sensuous delight of the world of Nature. He can feel the elemental joy of spring :

It was an April morning ; fresh and clear.
The rivulet, delighting in its strength,
Ran with a young man's speed, and yet the voice
Of waters which the river had supplied
Was softened down into a vernal tone.
The spirit of enjoyment and desire,
And hopes and wishes, from all living things
Went circling, like a multitude of sounds.

He can take a pleasure fully as keen in the placid lake :

The calm
And dead still water lay upon my mind
Even with a weight of pleasure, and the sky,
Never before so beautiful, sank down
Into my heart, and held me like a dream.

He can vividly describe all the little graces and charms of a summer day :

The northern downs
In clearest air ascending, showed far off
A surface dappled o'er with shadows fleecy
From brooding clouds,

and can throw the very spirit of June into a couplet :

Flaunting Summer when he throws
His soul into the briar rose.

A careful study of Wordsworth's Nature-descriptions shows that his eye and ear were very sensitive. In this connexion Arthur Compton-Rickett observes : "As the poet of the eye he has many peers, and in richness of effect and subtlety of appeal must yield the palm to a crowd of singers less great than himself; but when it comes to the symbolism of sound, Wordsworth is supreme."
No other poet could have written :

A voice so thrilling ne'er was heard
In springtime from the cuckoo-bird,
Breaking the silence of the seas
Among the farthest Hebrides,

Symbolism -

or in a very different mood have given us this :

Better than such discourse doth silence long,
Long, barren silence, square with my desire

To sit without emotion, hope, or aim,
In the loved presence of my cottage fire,
And listen to the flapping of the flame,
Or kettle whispering its faint undersong.

However, it should be noted that there are very few passages in Wordsworth's poetry which would justify us in claiming that his senses of touch, taste and smell were equally acute. 'Smooth', 'luscious', 'warm', 'fragrant'—these are no epithets for Wordsworth's poetry. His world is austere and bleak.

Nature's Life *To him Nature is a living entity.*

What distinguishes Wordsworth from other poets of Nature is that for him Nature is a living entity. The indwelling spirit in Nature imparts its own consciousness to all objects of Nature.

To every natural form, rock, fruit and flower,
Even the loose stones that cover the highway
I gave a moral life : I saw them feel.

His faith that every object of Nature is a sentient being is firmly expressed in *Lines written in Early Spring* :

And 'tis my faith that every flower
Enjoys the air it breathes.

In *The Prelude* we find many passages in which Wordsworth strongly expresses his belief in the inner life of Nature. Once when he had stolen a bird from the trap of some other boy, he heard among the solitary hills—

Low breathings coming after me, and sounds
Of undistinguishable motion, steps
Almost as silent as the turf they trod.

Similarly, when he had stolen a boat to explore the silent lake in the evening, he felt as if a huge peak upreared its head,

And growing still in stature the grim shape
Towered up between me and the stars, and still,
For so it seemed, with purpose of its own
And measured motion like a living thing,
Strode after me.

To reveal the invisible impulses at work behind the outward beauty of Nature was the mission of Wordsworth's life. As Stopford Brooke puts it : "He (Wordsworth) conceived, as poet, that Nature was alive. It had, he imagined, one living soul which, entering into flower, stream, or mountain, gave them each a soul of their own."

Joy in Nature

If we explore the inner life of Nature as Wordsworth conceives it, we find that one of its characteristics is its joy. To *The Daisy* speaks of the 'cheerful flower' as alert and gay. *I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud* depicts the jocund daffodils that outdo the sparkling waves in

glee. In *Three Years She Grew in Sun and Shower* the poet represents Nature as imparting to Lucy its own 'vital feelings of delight'. In all these poems he may be only figurative in expression. But we cannot regard the following assertion as other than literal :

Yet, whate'er enjoyments dwell
In the impenetrable cell
Of the silent heart which Nature
Furnishes to every creature ;
Whatsoe'er we feel and know
Too sedate for outward show,
Such a light of gladness breaks,
Pretty Kitten ! from thy freaks.

"The clearest statement to be found in Wordsworth of his belief in Nature's joyous life occurs in *Lines Written in Early Spring*. Herein he states his faith that every flower enjoys the air it breathes'. In the birds and the budding twigs there is also enjoyment :

And I must think, do all I can,
That there was pleasure there. } *Nature breathes in every object -*

In *To My Sister* the poet recognizes 'a sense of joy' in nature and a 'blessed power' that rolls through all things about us. These poems deserve a more absolute acceptance as a record of Wordsworth's thought than some critics have been inclined to give to them."*

Universal Love in Nature *Nature is kind and kindly - (Fostering, nature)*

Like other poets and philosophers, with a religious determination to find design, order, and harmony everywhere in the universe, and to ignore everything that seems to contradict this providential interpretation, it was inevitable that Wordsworth should find that Nature is 'kind' and 'kindly', that it is 'fostering Nature', 'holy Nature', and that it teaches a 'lesson deep of love'. In Wordsworth the conviction of the universal presence of love in Nature is equally characteristic of his writing in phases as distinct from one another as those of *The Excursion* and *Lyrical Ballads*. We find his classic treatment of this theme in the poem *To My Sister*. On the first mild day of March the poet asks his sister to put on her woodland dress and come out with him for a walk ; they will drink in the love which is abroad in the air, and so prepare their spirits for the whole year that is to come.

Love, now a universal birth,
From heart to heart is stealing,
From earth to man, from man to earth :
—It is the hour of feeling.
One moment now may give us more
Than years of toiling reason :

"To My Sister"

*Melvin Rader, *Wordsworth—A Philosophical Approach* (O.U.P./London, 1967), p. 188.

Our minds shall drink at every pore
 The spirit of the season.
 Some silent laws our hearts will make,
 Which they shall long obey :
 We for the year to come may take
 Our temper from today.
And from the blessed power that rolls
About, below, above,
We'll frame the measure of our souls :
They shall be turned to love.

Spiritual Unity of Nature

It is "Nature's law", Wordsworth says, that "forms created the most vile and brute" should not "exist divorced from good." The life of the whole imparts a pulse of good to each fragment. Value is not confined ; it spreads outward until it affects the entire circum-ambient region. As the poet declares in *The Excursion*,

Whate'er exists hath properties that spread
 Beyond itself, communicating good,
 A simple blessing, or with evil mixed ;
 Spirit that knows no insulated spot,
 No chasm, no solitude.

Since every object of Nature impresses itself on others and each reflects its neighbours, the vice of ever 'dividing' falsifies reality.

For all things in this little world of ours
 Are in one bosom of close neighbourhood.

Wordsworth's disposition to regard natural objects as neighbourly appears in poem after poem. The spiritual unity of Nature enters into the design of *I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud*, *Nutting*, *Hart-Leap Well*, and *Lines Written in Early Spring*. A suggestion of life and interplay distinguishes many scattered lines :

The Winds come to me from the fields of sleep,
 And all the earth is gay.

... ..

... 'mid all this mighty sum
 Of things for ever speaking.

... ..

Loud is the Vale ! the Voice is up
 With which she speaks when storms are gone,
 A mighty unison of streams !
 Of all her Voices, One !

These passages bring out the mysterious bonds of unity behind the apparent disconnexion of things. Wordsworth has a kind of primitive sense or intuition

Of unknown modes of being which on earth,
Or in the heavens, or in the heavens and earth
Exist by mighty combinations, bound
Together by a link, and with a soul
Which makes all one.

There is a spirit or a pervasive atmosphere that draws things together into a natural community.

Mystical Approach to Nature

Wordsworth's approach to Nature is that of a mystic. As his friend Aubrey De Vere puts it : "Wordsworth looked at nature as the mystics of old perused the pages of the Holy Writ, making little of the letter, but passing through it to the spiritual interpretation." Wordsworth found in the meadows and the woods and mountains the spiritual stimulus that Blake sought in purely imaginary visions. In his copy of Wordsworth's *Poems* Blake wrote the comment : "Natural objects always did and now do weaken, deaden and obliterate Imagination in Me. Wordsworth must know that what he Writes Valuable is Not to be found in Nature." As the more comprehensive poet, Wordsworth wanted to go beyond but not away from Nature.

Wordsworth remained a poet of 'the mighty world of eye and ear' till the end of his life. So his mysticism is grounded and rooted, actually, in the senses. His Nature mysticism is clearly evident in *Tintern Abbey* :

Nor less, I trust,
To them I may have owed another gift,
Of aspect more sublime ; that blessed mood,
In which the burthen of the mystery
In which the heavy and the weary weight
Of all this intelligible world,
Is lightened : that serene and blessed mood,
In which the affections gently lead us on,—
Until, the breath of this corporeal frame
And even the motion of our human blood
Almost suspended, we are laid asleep
In body, and become a living soul :
While with an eye made quiet by the power
Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,
We see into the life of things.

In *The Prelude* Book VI the poet speaks of the moments

When the light of sense
Goes out in flashes that have shown to us
The invisible world.

In such moments all visible Nature appears as the manifestation of the one indwelling spirit : —

(Go wordsworth's value of the invisible world appears as the manifestation of the one indwelling spirit)

CC-0 Agamigam Digital Preservation Foundation, Chandigarh. Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Were all like workings of one mind, the features
Of the same face, blossoms upon one tree
Characters of the great Apocalypse,
The types ; and symbols of Eternity
Of first and last, and midst, and without end.

Spurgeon has rightly observed : "Wordsworth was not only a poet, he was also a seer and mystic and a practical psychologist with an amazingly subtle mind and an unusual capacity for feeling. It was not the beauty of Nature which brought him joy and peace, but the life in Nature. He himself had caught a vision of that life. He knew it and felt it, and it transformed the whole of existence for him. He believed that every man could attain this vision which he so fully possessed and his whole life's work took a form of minute and careful analysis of the process of feeling in his own nature."

Bond between Nature and Man

In his poetry Wordsworth shows how human beings fit into the midst of the interplaying forces of Nature. In *Three years she grew in sun and shower* Lucy is taken up into the life of Nature and incorporated with it. The same is true of Michael, the Leech-gatherer, the Solitary Reaper, the Highland Girl, the Danish Boy, and Louisa in the Shade. They seem made all of a piece with the world around them, so that they almost have their being in the elemental forms that pervade their natural domain. Even the rebellious Toussaint L'Ouverture is a power among other powers in Nature :

Thou hast left behind
Powers that will work for thee ; air, earth, and skies ;
There's not a breathing of the common wind
That will forget thee ; thou hast great allies.

Wordsworth believes that there is a pre-existing harmony between the mind of man and Nature. The individual mind, as he declared in the fragment of the *Recluse*, is exquisitely fitted to the external world and no less exquisitely the external world is fitted to the mind. The mind with him is always the creative masculine principle ; Nature is always the feminine principle. Thus he writes in the *Recluse*,

For the discerning intellect of Man, *mind* .
When wedded to this goodly universe
In love and holy passion, shall find these
(Paradise, and groves Elysian, and Fortunate Fields)

A simple produce of the common day.
—I, long before the blissful hour arrives,
Would chant, in lonely peace, the spousal verse
Of this great consummation.....

"Man and Nature, Mind and the external world, are geared together and in unison complete the motive principle of the universe."

They act and react upon each other, 'so as to produce an infinite complexity of pain and pleasure'. The exquisite functioning of this interlocked universe of Mind and Nature is for Wordsworth the highest theme of poetry; in poetry the process actually receives its final consummation."^{*}

Nature's Soothing Influence and Healing Power

Since the individual mind and the external world are exquisitely fitted to each other, communion between the two is possible. But this communion is possible only when the soul of man is in harmony with the soul of Nature. In his poetry Wordsworth shows how human beings, who are separated from all that in everyday humanity is disturbing or distressing, take on something of

the silence and the calm
Of mute insensate things.

In *The Thorn* the finest passage is that in which the tragic figure comes nearest to union with the elements :

And she is known to every star
And every wind that blows.

Michael owes much of his impressiveness to the statement that

When others heeded not, he heard the South
Make subterraneous music.

The Shepherd in Book VIII of *The Prelude*, seen against a mountain background, is

man
Ennobled outwardly before my sight,
and the poet thanks the God of Nature and of Man that

men before my inexperienced eyes
Did first present themselves thus purified,
Removed, and to a distance that was fit.

What was amiss with Peter Bell, and made him (in his unregenerate days) a moral monster, was that

At noon, when by the forest's edge
He lay beneath the branches high,
The soft blue sky did never melt
Into his heart ; he never felt
The witchery of the soft blue sky !

In any attempt to understand what Nature meant to Wordsworth due weight should be given to the healing power of the impersonal over a sick mind. It was when the 'fretful stir Unprofitable, and the fever of the world' had long 'hung upon the beatings of my heart' that he turned to Nature, and found 'for this uneasy heart of

^{*}Herbert Read, *Wordsworth* (Faber & Faber Ltd/London, 1949), pp. 126-27.

ours a never-failing principle of joy'. He received from the 'calm oblivious tendencies of Nature' both stimulus and anodyne :

I well remember that those very plumes,
Those weeds and the high spear-grass on that wall,
By mist and silent rain-drops silvered o'er,
As once I passed, into my heart conveyed
So still image of tranquillity,
So calm and still, and looked so beautiful
Amid the uneasy thoughts which filled my mind,
That what we feel of sorrow and despair
From ruin and from change, and all the grief
That passing shows of Being leave behind,
Appeared an-idle dream.

"Thus Nature's healing-power, which for some may be merely an outworn doctrine, was for him a fact of experience, and the rapture of that experience, which glows through *Tintern Abbey* and much of his best poetry, can be caught by any reader, without reference to the ethical and philosophical theories which Wordsworth evolved from it."*

Nature's Teaching

(Received the best part of education from nature)

A careful reading of *The Prelude* clearly shows that Wordsworth received the best part of his education from Nature. In the first two books of this autobiographical poem we find that Nature has been acting as a sort of glorified parent or schoolmistress. The poet gives 'thanks to the means which Nature deigned to employ'—the discipline of fear and joy through which its benign Hartleian curriculum has been fulfilled. He has given many examples of Nature's 'ministries' and 'interventions' whereby it reproved his childish delinquencies :

I heard among the solitary hills
Low breathings coming after me, and sounds
Of undistinguishable motion, steps
Almost as silent as the turf they trod.

... ..

Suspended by the blast that blew amain,
Shouldering the naked crag, oh at that time
While on the perilous ridge I hung alone,
With what strange utterance did the loud dry wind
Blow through my ear ! the sky seemed not a sky
Of earth—and with what motion moved the clouds !

... ..

but after I had seen
That spectacle, for many days, my brain
Worked with a dim and undetermined sense

*Basil Willey, *The Eighteenth Century Background* (Chatto & Windus/ London, 1950), p. 283.

WORDSWORTH'S POETRY OF NATURE

31

Of unknown modes of being ; o'er my thoughts
 There hung a darkness, call it solitude,
 Or blank desertion. No familiar shapes
 Remained, no pleasant images of trees,
 Of sea or sky, no colours of green fields ;
 But huge and mighty forms, that do not live
 Like living men, moved slowly through the mind
 By day, and were a trouble to my dreams.

The first stage in experience, the beginning of each man's education, is the reception of impressions through the avenues of the senses. This stage is emphasized in two poems of 1798—*Expostulation and Reply* and *Tables Turned*. In *Expostulation and Reply* Wordsworth's friend Matthew—a person whom the poet describes in a note as 'somewhat unreasonably attached to modern books of moral philosophy'—reproaches the poet with his neglect of bookish knowledge. And it is thus Wordsworth defends himself :

The eye—it cannot choose but see ;
We cannot bid the ear be still ;
Our bodies feel, where'er they be,
Against or with our will.

Nor less we deem that there are Powers
Which of themselves our minds impress ;
That we can feed this mind of ours
In a wise passiveness.

In *The Tables Turned* Wordsworth asks his friend to leave his books and come out into the open, since he can learn more about man and about moral good and evil from the spring woods than from all the sages.

One impulse from a vernal wood
May teach you more of man,
Of moral evil and of good,
Than all the sages can.

We might object that an impulse from a vernal wood cannot in fact teach us anything at all about good and evil. However, we find the lines that follow more easily acceptable.

Sweet is the lore which Nature brings ;
Our meddling intellect
Mis-shapes the beauteous forms of things :
We murder to dissect.

Here Wordsworth is not recommending—any more than Rousseau—an abandonment of books and learning, but is simply urging a restoration of the balance between book-learning and the direct inspirations of Nature.

"Beneath a half-playful and even superficial opposition to science and philosophizing, there is the wholly serious demand, central to Wordsworth's faith, for a total response by man's nature to

the non-human nature around him. Those who are worried by Wordsworth's habit of finding sermons in stones are free to give up that side of his work, but they would also be wise to remember the remark of a later poet, Yeats, extremely unlike Wordsworth, that in the poet's church there is an altar but no pulpit; and that morals drawn from the lesser celandine are not the core of Wordsworth's belief."*

Nature as a Norm of Conduct *nature (as normal course of things)*

In *Lines written in Early Spring* Wordsworth uses the word 'Nature' as signifying the normal course of things, to which it is wise for man to submit as a matter of hygiene. Nature then is taken as a norm of conduct for man. Science impartially notes that Nature is full of pleasure and pain; but the means by which 'fostering' Nature leads birds to function as birds he finds to be pleasure, the gratification of their instincts. Seizing on this hopeful aspect of things, Wordsworth reminds man that he is capable of pleasure in a high degree, and exhorts him to cultivate to the utmost the capacities with which Nature has endowed him.

In *The Excursion* we find passages in which Wordsworth lays emphasis on Nature's plan for man. The Solitary in this poem is a typical victim of romantic egoism, melancholy and cynicism. He has retired to a life of solitude, and is sinking deeper and deeper into the bog of his own dark thoughts. He does not even take advantage of the 'natural' means of maintaining his physical and mental health. The poet asks the Solitary not to study so late but to get up early in the morning and climb the hill daily, and join too in the hunt of the 'red deer'.

Take courage, and withdraw yourself from ways
That run not parallel to nature's course.

Here Wordsworth has used the word 'Nature' as signifying the laws of health and the close relation between physical and mental well-being. In the story of poor Magdalene he uses the word to signify the psychological conditions which, being violated, may result in bodily harm. Referring to the cruelty of her employers who do not allow her to visit the graveyard to indulge her feeling of penitence and grief over the loss of her child, he says,

I failed not to remind them that they erred;
For holy Nature might not thus be crossed,
Thus wronged in woman's breast: in vain I pleaded—
But the green stalk of Ellen's life was snapped,
And the flower drooped.....

There would be little point in multiplying examples of such use of the word 'Nature', since it is not peculiar to Wordsworth or to other poets of Nature.

* Graham Hough, *The Romantic Poets* (Arrow Books Ltd/London, 1961),

The Alleged Loss of Faith in Nature

In many passages of the later books of *The Prelude* Wordsworth expresses some views which strongly resemble Spinoza's. Stallknecht finds that Wordsworth's later conception of the imagination owes much to Spinoza's 'intuition', and that this conception 'answers the problems which Wordsworth's encounter with Godwinism had summoned to his mind'. As Wordsworth grew older, however, Stallknecht holds, 'the Spinozian morality ceased to give him entire satisfaction'. He then turned to Kant, whose influence is evident in *Ode to Duty* and *The Excursion*. It should be noted that, whether Wordsworth's later ethics was Kantian or Spinozistic, or neither of the two, his way of regarding Nature came to be markedly at odds with his earlier Hartleian views.

In his callow Jacobinical days Wordsworth had written :
 Cataracts and mountains are good occasional society, but they will not do for constant companions." His later life seems to prove the truths of this statement, though he would never have admitted it. The *Ode on Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood* registers an almost complete abandonment of his earlier doctrine of Nature. As Basil Willey puts it : "There is, indeed, a certain pathos in the circumstance that his most splendidly sustained utterance should have been a farewell to his own visionary power." References to Nature continue to be frequent throughout the later poems of Wordsworth ; but, as has been universally recognized, the heart has gone out of his poetry of Nature. "Wordsworth no longer calls himself, as in 'Tintern Abbey', a 'worshipper of Nature'. His faith in nature seems to maintain itself mechanically on the momentum gained in his youth. It yields more and more to a theological faith, which tends to drain it of its strength. More than once he indulges in reservations and abatements. In 'The Excursion', referring again to the rites of baptism, he reminds us—

.....that Man by Nature lies
 Bedded for good and evil in a gulf
 Fearfully low.....

He seems to have quite forgotten the Hartleian psychology which makes so much, in the building up of the human spirit, of 'the language of the sense'. The 'naturalism' has quite faded out of his concept of nature."*

Limitations in Wordsworth's Attitude towards Nature

Wordsworth's view of Nature has been severely criticised by some well-known critics. "It is sometimes argued that Wordsworth's belief in the moral value of the love of fine scenery is a fallacy ; that communion with mountains does not generate any 'pure principle of love', but it is only a form of self-glorification, leading to an anti-

*Joseph Warren Beach, *The Concept of Nature in Nineteenth-Century English Poetry* (Russell & Russell, New York, 1966), p. 157.

All these opinions are not acceptable to us ; but we must not overlook the obvious limitations in Wordsworth's attitude towards Nature. The Nature he communed with was the Nature of the English Lakes. The burning sirocco, the overwhelming avalanche, the dreary skeleton-strewn Sahara, the frozen solitudes of the Pole, the tiger's cruel beauty, and the death-rattle of the snake—all these sinister aspects of Nature and such as these, he ignores. Hence arises the tone of complacent optimism that pervades his poetry. He sits amidst the budding loveliness of spring, and the only thought that damps his joy is the remembrance of 'What man has made of man'. How different are the reflections of the hero of Tennyson's *Maud*, seated amid the same beautiful surroundings :

For nature is one with rapine, a harm no preacher can
heal ;
The Mayfly is torn by the Swallow, the sparrow spear'd
by the shrike,
And the whole little wood where I sit is a world of plunder
and prey.

It is for Tennyson, not for Wordsworth, that Nature 'red in tooth and claw with ravine shrieks against his creed' that love is the ruling power in the universe.

Wordsworth's chief originality is, of course, to be sought in his poetry of Nature. But it is not the mere fact of his being a poet of Nature that makes him unique. What gives him his uniqueness is the fact that he is, of all English poets, the one who has given the most impressive and the most emotionally satisfying account of man's relation to Nature. He thinks of all created things, human or inanimate, as parts of one great whole, filling their appointed place, moving in their established order. He is the greatest Nature poet of England because he is the poet of more than external Nature ; he is, in a higher degree, the poet of man.

* Basil Willey, *The Eighteenth Century Background* (Chatto & Windus London, 1950), pp. 272-73.

A foot of
man -
He is more
than a foot
of ordinary
nature.

London, 1950), pp. 272-73.

Wordsworth's Poetry of Man

Theme of wordsworth's poetry was not Nature but the heart of man

Introduction

Wordsworth is universally recognized as a great poet of Nature. But he was not content to be thought, or to be, a poet of Nature only, singing the sensuous joy of a life lived in natural surroundings, like Cowper in *The Task* :

God made the country, and Man made the town.

Wordsworth aspired to become a philosophical poet, whose ultimate theme was not Nature but the heart of man. And the poetry of man took in his hands as great a development as the poetry of Nature.

Growth of his Love of Man

Most men begin with the primary affections ; and the love of Nature is an after-thought, if it comes at all. But in the case of Wordsworth the love of Nature came first, and even when the love of man came, it was interwoven with Nature's influences.

In the note to a very early poem Wordsworth tells us of some natural aspect that struck him in boyhood : "It was in the way between Hawkshead and Ambleside, and gave me extreme pleasure. The moment was important in my poetical history, for I date from it my consciousness of the infinite variety of natural appearances which had been unnoticed by the poets of any age or country, so far as I was acquainted with them ; and I made a resolution to supply, in some degree, the deficiency." It was only gradually that human beings came into the landscape, and at first as no more than a completion to the picture. He sees the Cumberland shepherd like one 'in his own domain', among the rocks, and outlined against the sky :

Thus was man
Ennobled outwardly before my sight,
And thus my heart was early introduced
To an unconscious love and reverence
Of human nature :

still secondary to Nature—

a passion, she,
A rapture often, and immediate love
Ever at hand ; he, only a delight
Occasional, an accidental grace,
His hour being not yet come.

The hour came with a consciousness, henceforward deeply, but not passionately, felt with a moved, grave, pitying and respectful, but not passionate, sympathy with passion, of

Man suffering among awful Powers and Forms.

His strong Republican Sympathies

"The French Revolution has been built up for so long as an 'influence' on the early Romantics that we are apt to forget the English democratic revolution that preceded it. Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Blake were sons of the English Revolution, albeit one they recognized as not yet completed. Behind them was 1642 and 1688. Behind them also was the American War of Independence, the final fulfilment by Englishmen, even though on non-English soil, of the seventeenth-century objection to Kings and privilege."*

Wordsworth's temper was essentially democratic. He had lived in a democratic society ; at Cambridge also he found a democratic atmosphere. As he says in *The Prelude*,

.....we were brothers all
In honour as in one community,
Scholars and gentlemen.

temper essentially
democratic -

The ideals of the French Revolution—liberty, equality and fraternity—were in his very blood, and the Revolution in its first stage seemed to him no portent for good or evil but rather the tardy return of a society to its stable equilibrium.

Effect of the Revolution

"The determining factor in his career was the French Revolution—the great movement which, besides remaking France and Europe, made out very modes of thinking anew. While an undergraduate in Cambridge, Wordsworth made several vacation visits to France. The first peaceful phase of the Revolution was at its height ; France and the assembly were dominated by the little group of revolutionary orators who took their name from the south-western province from which most of them came, and with this group—the Girondists—Wordsworth threw in his lot. Had he remained he would probably have gone with them to the guillotine. As it was, the commands of his guardian brought him back to England, and he was forced to contemplate from a distance the struggle in which he

* John F. Danby, *William Wordsworth : The Prelude and Other Poems* (Edward Arnold Ltd/London, 1970), p. 20.

burned to take an active part. One is accustomed to think of Wordsworth as a mild old man, but such a picture if it is thrown back as a presentment of the Wordsworth of the nineties is far from the truth. This darkly passionate man tortured himself with his longings and his horror. War came and the prayers for victory in churches found him in his heart praying for defeat; then came the execution of the King; then the plot which slew the Gironda. Before all this Wordsworth trembled as Hamlet did when he learned the ghost's story. His faith in the world was shaken. First his own country had taken up arms against what he believed to be the cause of liberty. Then faction had destroyed his friends whom he believed to be its standard-bearers. What was in the world, in religion, in morality that such things could be? In the face of this tremendous problem, Wordsworth, unlike Hamlet, was resolute and determined."*

Lost faith in French Revolution as Political Creed.

Wordsworth lost his faith in the French Revolution as a political creed, but its effect remained intact on his mind. The Revolution humanized his soul and built him into a poet of man. It took him away from contemplation of his own soul to live in hope for mankind, to proclaim his faith in and seek the love of mankind. In his later years he became a conservative, but his belief in the basic ideals of the Revolution remained unshaken to the end of his life. It would be impossible to imagine Wordsworth going back on what he felt and knew as a young man in France: his vision of the girl and cow, with its wonderfully combined sympathy and indignation:

.....we chanced

One day to meet a hunger-bitten girl,
Who crept along fitting her languid gait
Unto a heifer's motion, by a cord
Tied to her arm, and picking thus from the lane
Its sustenance, while the girl with pallid hands
Was busy knitting in a heartless mood
Of solitude, and at the sight of my friend
In agitation said, "'Tis against that
That we are fighting", I with him believed
That a benignant spirit was abroad
Which might not be withstood.

Primal Qualities of Humanity *Every human being intrinsically great.*

The French Revolution taught Wordsworth that every human being was intrinsically great, and capable of infinite development. It promised to translate the idea into fact, and in the event disastrously belied its promise. But the poet set himself to examine the facts for himself. He would not give up his hopes for man till he had tested human nature in its elements. How was this to be done? "By stripping our own hearts naked, and by looking out of ourselves

*G.H. Mair, *English Literature 1450-1900* (Oxford University Press/ London, 1969), pp. 113-14.

towards men who lead the simplest lives, and those most according to Nature, men who have never known false refinements, wayward and artificial desires, effeminate ways of thinking and feeling."* In his wanderings on the country roads he came in contact with the humblest human beings. Their strength and energy surprised him. He saw into the depths of human souls,

Souls that appear to have no depth at all
To careless eyes.

He bent in reverence

To Nature and the power of human minds,
To men as they are men within themselves.

"man and nature are one"

"The power that surprised him in tramps and beggars and outcast women was not the thing that Godwin valued in man. It was feeling, not reason, that Wordsworth found when he groped to the bottom. (The elementary feelings, the essential passions of the heart are at their purest and simplest,) he found, in humble and rustic life. These are the powers in human nature which are like the primal energies of Nature: their strength, force, and beauty seem to spring from the same source; through them man and Nature are one. This was his discovery. When he reached this truth, and it remained truth for him to the end, his mind had recovered its tone, his imagination was released, and the poetry of the *Lyrical Ballads* and the *Lines composed above Tintern Abbey* followed."**

Depiction of Rustic Life

In the Preface to the 1809 edition of the *Lyrical Ballads* Wordsworth explains why he was interested in rustic life: "Humble and rustic life was generally chosen because in that condition the essential passions of the heart find a better soil in which they can attain their maturity, and are less underrestraint, and speak a plainer and more emphatic language; because in that condition of life our elementary feelings co-exist in a state of greater simplicity, and, consequently, may be more accurately contemplated and more forcibly communicated; because the manners of rural life germinate from these elementary feelings, and, from the elementary character of rural occupations, they are more easily comprehended, and are more durable: and lastly because in that condition the passions of men are incorporated with the beautiful and permanent forms of Nature."

Rousseau's theory of the essential dignity of the peasant is transformed in Wordsworth's poetry into an emphasis on the simplicity of the rustic. Wordsworth took for his heroes tramps, beggars, pedlars, waggoners and leech-gatherers. These rustics are always

* *The Early Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth* (Oxford University Press/London, 1935), p. 295.

** Helen Darbishire, *The Poet Wordsworth* (Oxford University Press/London, 1950), p. 29.

"Depiction of the rustic life"

under the direct influence of Nature. They come to us with some of the immobility of natural objects, set there among their rocks and stones like a part of them, scarcely more sentient, or scarcely less interpenetrated with the unconscious lesson of Nature. They are a growth of the soil, and when they speak, with the emphatic slowness of the peasant, we are almost surprised that beings so rudimentary can become articulate.

Words are but under-agents in their souls ;
When they are grasping with their greatest strength
They do not breathe among them.

When we turn to those poems in which Wordsworth is most human, and at the same time most himself as a poet, *The Leech-Gatherer, Michael, Animal Tranquillity and Decay, The Old Cumberland Beggar,* we see that they are all motionless, or moving imperceptibly, like the old beggar :

He is so still
In look and motion, that the cottage curs,
Ere he have passed the door, will turn away,
Weary of barking at him.

"And Wordsworth conveys this part of natural truth to us as no other poet has ever done, no other poet having had in him so much of the reflective peasant."*

Interest in the Commonplaces of Life

We may apply to Wordsworth's general attitude towards the human comedy what he says in *The Prelude* of his attitude towards a play on the stage :

For though I was most passionately moved
And yielded to all changes of the scene
With an obsequious promptness, yet the storm
Passed not beyond the suburbs of the mind.

He distrusts whatever dazzles ; he distrusts whatever is abnormal. The stories which he tells in his poems are of the simplest, a mere setting for his meditations on some aspect of ordinary human nature. Nothing that Wordsworth has written is more full of incident or more rapid in movement than his *Song at the Feast of Brougham Castle*, but the purpose of the whole poem lies in its quiet ending. In the *Hart-leap Well* he says,

The moving accident is not my trade ;
To freeze the blood I have no ready arts.

He tells us that he found his trade in

the vulgar forms of present things,
The actual world of our familiar days.

*Arthur Symons, *The Romantic Movement in English Poetry* (Phaeton Press/New York, 1969), p. 92.

There is no more striking passage on the subjects Wordsworth chooses for his poetry than three short stanzas in the prologue to his *Peter Bell*.

Long have I loved what I behold,
The night that calms, the day that cheers ;
The comon growth of mother-earth,
Her humblest mirth and tears.

The dragon's wing, the magic ring,
I shall not covet for my dower,
If I along that lowly way
With sympathetic heart may stray,
And with a soul of power.
These given, what more need I desire
To stir, to soothe, or elevate ?
What nobler prospects than the mind
May in life's daily prospect find,
May find or there create ?

"Wordsworth had never any wish to escape from the commonplaces of life. He accepted them all, and viewed them with a calmness and a courage that could never be shaken."*

Main Theme of his Poems of Incidents in Human Life

The main theme of Wordsworth's poems of incidents in human life is love, the workings of love, its power to inflict the deepest wounds and to heal the most irreparable. Love is the theme of poems such as *Goody Blake and Harry Gill*, *Simon Lee*, *The Thorn*, *The Last of the Flock*, *The Mad Mother*, *The Idiot Boy* and *The Complaint of a Forsaken Indian Woman*. Love not as passion in the narrow sense of the word but passionate affection, its 'wily subtleties and refluxes', this is what Wordsworth is in quest of in later and finer poems—*Michael*, *The Brothers*, *Margaret*, *The Affliction of Margaret*, *Ruth*, *The Happy Warrior*, *The White Doe of Rylstone* ; and to these should be added the stories narrated by the Parson in *The Excursion*, and yet more the patriotic sonnets. In a prophetic intuition he apprehended the law of Nature as ultimately the law of love. What is law in the inanimate world is in the free nature of man duty, and duty is ultimately the law of love :

Flowers laugh before thee in their beds,
And fragrance in thy footing treads ;
Thou dost preserve the stars from wrong ;
And the most ancient heavens through thee are fresh and strong.

But,

Serene will be our days and bright,
And happy will our natures be,

* David Nichol Smit, *Introduction to Wordsworth : Poetry and Prose* (Oxford University Press/London, 1956), p. 13.

When love is an unerring light,
And joy its own security.

"Of love in a great but restricted sense of the word Wordsworth had, as we have seen, comparatively little to say...romantic love--

Love unconquerable, who makes havoc of men's wealth, who keepest thy vigil in the soft cheeks of a maiden—(Sophocles)—

the love of the songs of Donne and Burns and Sappho and Catullus. That element Wordsworth seems to have cut out of his life early. But love in St. Paul's sense of 'caritas' that 'beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things'—sympathy with his fellow-men and desire for their welfare—that is the key-note of all his poetry, the source and inspiration of the joy of which he sings :

Love now a universal birth
From heart to heart is stealing.

And you must love him ere to you
He'll seem worthy of your love,

and of the pathos of *The Ruined Cottage*, of *Michael*, of *The Brothers*, of *The Affliction of Margaret*."*

Cloud of Human Destiny

Matthew Arnold says that Wordsworth 'put by' the cloud of human destiny. But we find many passages in Wordsworth's poems which show that he saw this cloud and looked at it steadily. In this connexion particular mention may be made of such famous lines as

The still sad music of humanity.

... ..
the fierce confederate storm

Of sorrow, barricadoed evermore

Within the walls of cities.

... ..
Amid the groves, under the shadowy hills,
The generations are prepared ; the pangs,
The internal pangs, are ready ; the dread strife
Of poor humanity's afflicted will
Struggling in vain with ruthless destiny.

If we examine the themes of many of Wordsworth's famous poems on human life—the themes, for example, of *The Thorn*, *The Sailor's Mother*, *Ruth*, *The Brothers*, *Michael*, *The Affliction of Margaret*, *The White Doe of Rylstone*, the story of Margaret in *Excursion*, i., half the stories told in *Excursion*, vi. and vii.—we find

*Sir Herbert J. C. Grierson; *Milton and Wordsworth—Poets and Prophets* (Chatto & Windus/London, 1956), pp. 181-82.

ourselves in the presence of poverty, crime, insanity, ruined innocence, torturing hopes doomed to extinction, solitary anguish, even despair. These poems take us to a dark world. So the poet saw the cloud of human destiny. But he did not pretend to understand its darkness. The world was to him in the end 'this unintelligible world'. As Bradley puts it : "He (Wordsworth) sang of pleasure, joy, glee, blitheness, love, wherever in nature or humanity they assert their indisputable power ; and turning to pain and wrong, and gazing at them steadfastly, and setting himself to present the facts with a quiet but unsparing truthfulness, he yet endeavoured to show what he had seen, that sometimes pain and wrong are the conditions of a happiness and good which without them could not have been, that no limit can be set to the power of the soul to transmute them into its own substance, and that, in suffering and even in misery, there may still be such a strength as fills us with awe or with glory." Wordsworth did not pretend that what he saw sufficed to solve the riddle of the painful earth, but he 'fronted' the cloud of human destiny 'fearlessly'.

Solution of the Problem of Life

According to Wordsworth impulse and law are the foci of life. His poetry shows that life is fullest and most joyous when a strong impulse flows unchecked in the course prescribed for it by the law of an organic creature's being. He wishes us to learn from Nature, from simpler beings than our own, this secret of the joy he finds in Nature :

Through primrose tufts, in that green bower,
The periwinkle trailed its wreaths ;
And 'tis may faith that every flower
Enjoys the air it breathes.

The birds around me hopped and played,
Their thoughts I cannot measure :
But the least motion which they made,
It seemed a thrill of pleasure.

So might man live if he would trust what are the native instincts of his heart—faith, reverence and love :

Ye motions of delight that haunt the sides
Of the green hills ; ye breezes and soft airs
Whose subtle intercourse with breathing flowers
Feelingly watched might teach man's haughty race
How without injury to take, to give
Without offence.

By love subsists
All lasting grandeur, by pervading love :
That gone we are as dust.

Man and Nature

Wordsworth treats man and Nature ever in the same way :

Love had he found in huts where poor men lie,
His daily teachers had been woods and rills,
The silence that is in the starry sky,
The sleep that is among the lovely hills.

He makes no division between man and the world in which he lives.
He draws our attention to the poor Cumberland beggar, and enlists
our sympathies for the old leech-gatherer ; placing each of these
simple figures in a noble background of landscape and cloudscape
until they are dignified by the spacious beauty of the earth :

Gray locks profusely round his temples hung
 In clustering curls like ivy, which the bite
 Of Winter cannot thin ; the fresh air lodged
 Within his cheek as light within a cloud.

In *The Prelude* he relates how shepherds of the Lake hills had been seen by him as part of the wild scenery in which he lived and he mixed up their life with the grandeur of Nature and came to honour them as part of its being. Walter Raleigh rightly observes : "It is by a great imaginative gift that Wordsworth sees man in his surroundings ; his men are spirits of the Earth, wrought upon by the elements from which they are compounded. Hence in his descriptions of humanity there is a kind of magic purity ; the influences of earth and sky are everywhere felt in human feature and character." Indeed, many of Wordsworth's men and women are felt to be the incarnations of the different moods of Nature. Lucy and the Highland Girl seem to embody the spirit of joy in Nature ; Ruth, Margaret and the Leech-gatherer are incarnations of its more grave aspects.

"Apart from the sanctifying touch of Nature, men and women are poor creatures to Wordsworth. The farther we travel from Nature, the more paltry we become. This is the burden of his splendid sonnet *The world is too much with us*. Better, he says in effect, people the woods and streams, the plains and ocean, with nymphs and gods and goddesses, and retain something of the fresh simplicity and austere endurance of Nature, than give up our souls to the mere accumulation of wealth and to the superficial life of pleasure."*

Limitations in Wordsworth's View of Man

Wordsworth's sympathy with human nature was intense,
but it was somewhat narrow in range. It has been said that large
tracts of human feeling and experience were unvisited by him and
lay beyond his horizon'. But his narrowness is not that of conscious

* Arthur Compton-Rickett, *A History of English Literature* (Thomas Nelson & Sons Ltd/London, 1963), p. 311.

Large tracts of human feeling and experience were unvisited by him and lay beyond his horizon

superiority. Wordsworth loves his fellow-men with such intensity, is so full of his message of peace and happiness that he is indifferent to aspects of their life irrelevant to his great purpose. In this connexion Compton-Rickett observes : "He watches men and women with the expectant gaze of a man who is looking for some particular attitude or posture which he is anxious to portray. No doubt by this method he missed a great deal of rich human material, but he is a moralist at heart, with one steady purpose in view, and leaving aside much that was fascinating and perplexing, he contents himself with a few broad, simple issues : and there, at his best, he exhibits a massive splendour of compelling power."

Conclusion

Wordsworth we think of principally as a poet of Nature, but that is an incomplete view. Most of his poems deal with human life, and he is one of the great poets of humanity. Sympathy with his fellow-men and desire for their welfare constitute the key-note of all his poetry. Wordsworth 'fronted' the cloud of human destiny 'fearlessly', and with Shelley he found in love the ultimate solution of the problem of human life.

are generally think Wordsworth as a poet of nature, but this is an incomplete view. Most of his poems deal with human nature. He is one of the great poets of humanity -

- 1. Sympathy with his fellow beings*
- 2. Desire for their welfare -*
- 3. Found in love the ultimate solution of the problems of human life -*

Love for humanity the code of his feelings -

Influences on Wordsworth

Introduction

Wordsworth is one of the greatest poets of England. He is well-known as a writer of philosophical poems. But a careful study of his major poems shows that his mind must have owed its inspiration to a considerable variety of sources.

The French Revolution

The great events in France left a deep impression on Wordsworth's mind. It so happened that Wordsworth had first landed at Calais on the eve of the federation of 1790; so, the unparalleled mirth of that time seemed a festivity prepared for his welcome. The joy and hopefulness of the season turned into a charming benevolence, which he tasted with all the relish of a student on a holiday trip. Then came his prolonged stay in France, chiefly at Orleans and at Blois, from November 1791 to December 1792, in times already darkened by civil mistrust and violence. But, chance would have it that he should be eyewitness to heart-stirring scenes, such as the enlisting of volunteers and the proclamation of the republic. Above all, he had the good fortune to make friends with one of the true heroes of the day, Michel Beaupuy. Beaupuy was the revolutionary apostle described by Wordsworth, but there was less of the philosopher and more of the soldier in his composition. He found Wordsworth a bewildered foreigner and left him a determined revolutionist. A spirit of revolt and indignation against social iniquities pervaded Wordsworth for years, together with a sympathy, which never left him, for the poorer and humbler member of the community

"As a concrete historical movement the Revolution could not justify itself to his conscience; all the more desperately for a time he clung to republican theories; but the intellect, divorced from imagination and the vital movements of admiration, hope, and love, served with Wordsworth but to make all faiths dubious, and he underwent in consequence that spiritual crisis, terminating happily in recovery, of which the history is told in 'The Prelude'. It may

be questioned whether Wordsworth, after he had parted with his democratic convictions and earned the name of renegade, did not retain a truer democratic sense of the dignity of manhood than is possessed by writers who deal fluently in the platitudes of servid Republicanism, and do lip-wordship to Humanity, while they exhibit in their temper and their themes all that can render humanity the reverse of worshipful.”*

Godwin

Wordsworth's Godwinian period begins in 1793 and ends some time in 1797. But it has two main divisions. Of these the first lies between the spring of 1793 and the summer of 1795 ; and may be called the epoch of semi-Godwinism. The poet describes himself as having, during, this period, 'lent but a careless ear' to the pretensions of Godwin, which were, however, 'sedulously urged' upon him. In these years the influence of Godwin was deep, but not sufficiently deep to exclude other influences and hopes which were, in fact, not logically compatible with it. The period of the fuller Godwinism is dated, so far as its beginning is concerned, with exactness by the poet himself. It begins in July 1795. It ends, without any time specification, in the *Lyrical Ballads*.

To Wordsworth's Godwinian period belong two compositions of first rate interest : *Guilt and Sorrow* and *The Borderers*. *Guilt and Sorrow* was first thought of in 1793 and it was finished before the close of 1794. Some time in 1797 Godwin's *Caleb Williams* was published ; and it is difficult not to believe that the central idea of the plot of *Guilt and Sorrow* is actually derived from the reading of that novel. *Guilt and Sorrow* is a distinctively morbid attack upon the whole social order, produced under the influence of Godwinism.

As Garrod puts it : "It is morbid in its execution ; morbid even where real and lively in detail. In its fundamental conception I take it to be, not only unreal, but immoral. It is merely not true. If great crimes and great virtues proceed from one source, if the good man is even more liable than the bad man to bad actions and bad passions, then we are, of all creatures, not only the most miserable, but the most uninteresting. The salt of human drama loses its savour, and what was tragic ceases, in becoming meaningless, to be moving."

The dramatic poem *The Borderers* was composed under conditions considerably different from those which gave birth to *Guilt and Sorrow*. It was begun in the autumn of 1795 when Wordsworth settled in Dorset. It was then that he first became an out-and-out Godwinian. Swinburne has spoken of the plot of this dramatic poem as characterized by a 'morbid and monstrous extravagance of hor-

* Edward Dowden, *Studies in Literature 1789-1877* (Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co, Ltd/London), p. 11.

INFLUENCES ON WORDSWORTH

47

rible impossibility'. To Legouis this tragedy is the beginning of a revolt against Godwinism. It is the villain of *The Borderers*, says Legouis, who is the Godwinian. "Whoever it be who talks the Godwinism in the play, or even if there were no Godwinism talked in it at all, what is really significant, and perhaps alone relevant, is that the poem is built out of an essentially Godwinian idea; the morbid tortuosity, the unnatural perversion of its plot, turns upon a ground-conception patently Godwinian, and that is, after all, the head and front of Mr. Swinburne's attack."*

Dorothy

When he wrote *The Borderers*, Wordsworth had already put an end to his solitary, wandering life and settled at Racedown with Dorothy (autumn of 1795). This settlement was the crowning of a long-cherished scheme. Wordsworth and Dorothy were passionately attached to each other. Dorothy's letters make their mutual love known to us and let us into depths of Wordsworth's nature, scarcely revealed by his poems. She speaks of 'a vehemence of affection' in him that his readers might not suspect, so careful he usually was, in Hazlitt's words, 'to calm the throbbing pulses of his own heart by keeping his eye ever fixed on the face of nature'. By this discipline, did he, in those years, slowly conquer his besetting thoughts of despondency. At this time there was, perhaps, no one in the world who could have been to Wordsworth such a companion as his sister became. Dorothy had not, of course, his grasp of mind or his poetic power; but her sensitiveness to Nature was quite as keen as his, and her disposition resembled his 'with sunshine added to daylight'.

*Sensitiveness
to Nature*

Birds in the bower and lambs in the green field,
Could they have known her, would have loved; methought
Her presence such a sweetness breathed,
That flowers, and trees, and even the silent hills,
And everything she looked on, should have had
An intimation how she bore herself
Towards them, and to all creatures.

Brother and sister were equally fond of natural scenery. Their delight in each other and their daily rambles were the first agents in the young disillusioned republican's recovery. Dorothy made him turn his eyes again to the landscape and take an interest in the peasants near their home. As Wordsworth puts it:

She gave me eyes, she gave me ears,
And humble cares, and delicate fears;
A heart the fountain of sweet tears;
And love, and thought, and joy.

"Wordsworth was in all things fortunate, but in nothing more fortunate than in this, that so unique a companion should have been

* H.W. Garrod, *Wordsworth: Lectures and Essays* (Oxford University Press/London, 1939), p. 91.

ready to devote herself to him with an affection wholly free from egotism or jealousy,—an affection that yearned only to satisfy his subtlest needs, and to transfuse all that was best in herself into his larger being.”*

Dorothy was a direct link with his childhood, and her presence carried him back to the mystical exaltations of the childhood days. 'The shooting lights of her wild eyes' reflected to the full the strain of imaginative emotion in the poet's nature. In *The Prelude* he tells us how her influence

like a brook

That did but cross a lonely road, and now
Seen, heard and felt, and caught at every turn,
Companion never lost through many a league,
Maintain'd for me a saving intercourse
With my true self.

Coleridge

Wordsworth and Coleridge had much in common. Both were country-born and early orphaned. Both in their short adult lives had been determinedly independent and original and therefore poor. Both had been living in the country, Wordsworth with 'a garden, orchard and every other convenience', Coleridge with rustic ideas which have not always received proper attention. The political sympathies of the two were also similar, though Coleridge, the junior by two and a half years, had been inflamed with real enthusiasm for the French Revolution about two and a half years later than Wordsworth. Coleridge, the son of a country parson and in his later years the philosopher of Trinitarianism, had from his Cambridge days been a Unitarian. He could never do without a religious life. This was his fundamental difference from Wordsworth, who could never do without a moral life.

Coleridge, 'with the capacious soul', influenced Wordsworth by his metaphysical gifts, 'the power he possessed of throwing out in profusion grand, central truths from which might be evolved the most comprehensive systems'. Coleridge was an omnivorous reader, and he had marvellous conversational power. He talked eloquently to Wordsworth on Plato and the neo-Platonists, Berkeley's idealism, the pantheistic system and serene necessitarianism of Spinoza, the intuitionist religion of the theosophists—a new world to one who had not yet gone beyond the rationalism of the eighteenth century and who always found his most congenial food in the associationism of Hartley.

How great the influence of Coleridge was is suggested by the remarks of Wordsworth after his friends' death. A neighbour recorded this conversation :

* F.W.H. Myers, *Wordsworth* (Macmillan & Co Ltd/London, 1912), pp. 27-28.

It was Sunday evening after the death occurred that my brother and I walked over to the Mount, where we found the Poet alone. One of the first things we heard from him was the death of one who had been, he said, his friend for more than thirty years. He then continued to speak of him : called him the most wonderful man he had ever known—wonderful for the originality of his mind, and the power he possessed of throwing off in profusion grand central truths from which might be evolved the most comprehensive systems ... Though a considerable period has elapsed during which they had not seen much of each other, Coleridge and he had been, uninterruptedly, in as close intimacy as man could be with man.

The bonds of thought and feeling between the two friends were so close during this intimacy that each was bound profoundly to affect the other. Wordsworth was not exaggerating when he said that Coleridge and 'my beloved sister are the two beings to whom my intellect is most indebted'.

"The influence of Coleridge was all the greater in consequence of the unsettled state of Wordsworth's convictions. When he first met Coleridge, he was just emerging from a stage of extreme intellectual demoralization. This was his 'soul's last and lowest ebb', when his faith in Godwin's theories had crumbled and he had 'given up moral questions in despair'. The crisis occurred in 1795, but the poet's bewilderment gave way slowly, and recovery was not complete until the summer of 1797 or thereafter. In this most impressionable period of his life Coleridge extended aid :

Ah ! then it was

That Thou, most precious Friend ! about this time
First known to me, didst lend a living help
To regulate my Soul.

In their endless talk the expansive mind of Coleridge must have invigorated his comrade's entire intellectual being. The friendship rapidly matured into close intimacy, and the genius of both poets burst into full bloom."*

The Philosophers *Wordsworth - a great lover of books*

Wordsworth was so uncommunicative in regard to his philosophical reading that there are few direct clues, but enough can be discovered to throw considerable light on his intellectual affiliations. He was a great lover of books. He frequently borrowed from public libraries, and he also purchased many volumes for his private collection. During his years at Cambridge he did not lead a particularly studious life, but he did run through a good many books. Writing in 1802 he included books among the sources of his intellectual strength :

* Melvin Rader, *Wordsworth—A Philosophical Approach* (O.U.P. London, 1967, p. 9.

Books, leisure, perfect freedom, and the talk
 Man holds with weak-day man in the hourly walk
 Of the mind's business : these are the degrees
 By which true Sway doth mount ; this is the stalk
 True power doth grow on ; and her rights are these.

Newton

Wordsworth's reference to the statue of Newton is famous :
...with his prism and silent face,
The marble index of a mind for ever
Voyaging through strange seas of Thought, alone.

Even before he went to Cambridge, the poet had conceived a romantic veneration for Newton ; and this emotion continued unabated throughout his life. Wordsworth looked upon Newton's 'discoveries' as 'the grandest ever known', but one suspects that it was less the scientist than the religious 'philosopher' that impressed him.

Newton's conception of subtle spirits and active principles in Nature seems to be echoed in a passage from *The Excursion* in which Wordsworth affirms that 'To every Form of being is assigned...An active Principle'. In the same passage 'the Soul of all the worlds' reminds one of Newton's 'Being incorporeal...in infinite Space'. Also reminiscent of Newton is the language of *Tintern Abbey* :

A motion and a spirit, that impels
 All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
 And rolls through all things.

Berkeley

Among the later English empiricists, Berkeley maintained that the vivid qualitative features of the natural world are genuinely real. One of his doctrines that inspired Coleridge and that may have impressed Wordsworth was the notion that we 'see God' in the same way that we 'see a man' ; that is to say, by means of sense data. In Berkeley's *Alciphron* the sense of sacredness, which had traditionally been associated with the supernatural, became attached to Nature itself.

The essence of the Wordsworthian revolution is precisely this transfer of the 'numinous' from the remote heavenly sphere to

...the very world, which is the world
Of all of us—the place where, in the end,
We find our happiness, or not at all !

We can illustrate this revolution by typical passages from Wordsworth's poetry :

Listen ! the mighty Being is awake,
And doth with his eternal motion make
A sound like thunder—everlastingly,

For feeling has to him imparted power
 That through the growing faculties of sense

INFLUENCES ON WORDSWORTH

51

Doth like an agent of the one great Mind
Create, creator and receiver both,
Working but in alliance with the works
Which it beholds.

... ..
 th' eternal spirit, he that has
 His life in unimaginable things
 And he who painting what he is in all
 The visible imagery of all the world.

Knowledge might have communicated the import of Berkeley to Wordsworth - J

"In combining a sensationist theory of knowledge with an immanent theism Berkeley may have contributed substantially to Wordsworth's religion of Nature. Whether the poet ever carefully studied Berkeley's works at first hand is immaterial, since Coleridge must have conveyed their import to him in conversations."*

Locke

Wordsworth's favourable reaction to the works of Locke is evident in his well-known remark : "The influence of Locke's Essay was not due to its own merits, which are considerable ; but to external circumstances. It came forth at a happy opportunity, and coincided with the prevalent opinions of the time...The best of Locke's works, it seems to me, is that in which he attempts the least—his *Conduct of the Understanding*." In *The Vale of Esthwaite* and *An Evening Walk* the poet uses Locke's famous metaphor of the *tabula rasa*, or mental tablet, on which sensations record impressions. The influence of other ideas of Locke, as distinguishable from those of Hartley, is difficult to trace. Perhaps Locke's 'historical plain method' contributed to the realistic strain in Wordsworth's poetry.

"(Locke's) doctrine which derived all our knowledge from sensation was capable of serving Wordsworth, who imbibed it through Hartley, as a philosophic sanction for his own deep-rooted instincts, and furnished him with at least a foundation for his conscious poetic theory. Wordsworth was working in the spirit and tradition of Locke when he rejected gaudy and inane phraseology and devoted his powers to the task of making verse 'deal boldly with substantial things'. And in a sense, moreover, Locke's 'new way of knowing by ideas', his insistence that all that we can contemplate is mind-stuff, contained the implication (though Locke would not have welcomed it) that 'mind is incorrigibly poetical'.....But, of course, much more than this was required before there could arise a theory of the imagination adequate to the dignity of poetry, and much had to be added to Locke's sensationalism before it could be pressed into the service of the creative power. Above all, there was required the conviction that the 'inanimate cold world' of the mechanical philosophy was not the whole reality, that there was a closer bond between

*Melvin Rader, *Wordsworth—A Philosophical Approach* (Oxford University Press/London, 1967), p. 47.

the mind and nature than the old dualism could conceive, and that Truth was not given to the naked Reason, but was constituted, in moments of impassioned vigilance, by the whole soul of man

Working but in alliance with the works
Which it beholds. **

Hartley (~~Insistence~~ *Insistence of physical sensation as the starting point of moral and intellectual development*)

Arthur Beatty maintains that Hartley's *Observations on Man* is the main source of Wordsworth's doctrines throughout his poetical maturity. The associationism of Hartley left a permanent mark on the poet's thought. In *Tintern Abbey* and *The Prelude* we find many striking reminders of the conceptions and phraseology of Hartley. Thus in the first book of *The Prelude* we have a distinct statement of how the principle of association worked to build up the mental life of the poet out of the materials provided by the senses.

"What attracted Wordsworth to Hartley was, for one thing, the insistence on physical sensation as the starting point of the process of intellectual and moral development. This appealed to Wordsworth's realism, his disposition to refer to the world of the senses as the standard of reality, to work from the natural towards the spiritual. This is, by the way, one of the main elements of strength in his poetry—the frankly physical, nay physiological, character of his imagery. It appears, to give one instance, in the regularity with which the 'heart', when referring to the emotions, is made to suggest the material organ which we carry in our breasts.....

.....when the fretful stir
Unprofitable, and the fever of the world,
Have hung upon the beatings of my heart....." **

How important Wordsworth considered the theory of associations is shown, for one thing, by his references to it in the famous Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*. He there states that his purpose is 'above all' to make 'the incidents and situations' of common life 'interesting by tracing in them, truly though not ostentatiously, the primary laws of our nature : chiefly, as far as regards the manner in which we associate ideas in a state of excitement'. This Preface, both in the 1800 version and the 1802 revision, contains other unmistakably associationist language.

Rousseau

It is difficult to determine the extent to which Rousseau may have influenced Wordsworth. Legouis contends that Wordsworth is intellectually 'a son of Rousseau'. George Mc Lean Harper

* Basil Willey, *The Seventeenth Century Background* (Chatto & Windus/ London, 1949), pp. 294-95.

** Joseph Warren Beach, *The Concept of Nature in Nineteenth Century English poetry* (Russell & Russell/ New York, 1966), p. 130.

also declares: "Rousseau it is, far more than any other man of letters, either of antiquity or of modern times, whose works have left their trace in Wordsworth's poetry." We can be sure that the poet was familiar with the writings of Rousseau. Rousseau's *Confessions* and *Emile* were among the books in the Rydal Mount library. In his *Descriptive Sketches* and the *Letter to the Bishop of Llandaff* Wordsworth uses the language of Rousseau to express his radical sentiments. Also in the Preface to *The Borderers* and in *The Convention of Cintra* he mentions the philosopher by name.

This evidence shows an early familiarity with Rousseau, but it is difficult to demonstrate a lasting admiration. The conclusion of the famous sonnet *Great men have been among us* indicates a generally low estimate of French writers. In *The Convention of Cintra* Wordsworth coupled Rousseau's name with that of Voltaire whom he despised: "The Spaniards are a people with imagination; and the paradoxical reveries of Rousseau, and the flippancies of Voltaire, are plants which will not naturalize in the country of Calderon and Cervantes." In the face of this over-reaction against French thought, it is impossible to share the view that the mature Wordsworth was 'a son of Rousseau'. Nevertheless, Wordsworth retained some trace of Rousseauism in his preference for the rustic, the untutored as against the sophisticated and urban. The introspective preoccupation with time and memory in Rousseau's *Confessions* and *Reveries of a Solitary Walker* foreshadows Wordsworth's time-consciousness in *The Prelude*.

Spinoza Wordsworth believed that progress is a necessary part of nature's plan.

During the days of his closest intimacy with Wordsworth, Coleridge must often have discoursed about the philosophy of Spinoza. Stirred to the depths by the French Revolution, Wordsworth joyously discovered the ardent faith in the inevitable progress of mankind when he listened to Beaupuy and read Godwin and Hartley. He evidently believed that necessary progress is part of Nature's 'holy plan' and that the mind's communion with Nature is its modus operandi.

He finally rejected Godwinian rationalism, but still clung tenaciously to the doctrine of necessity. He wanted to fit necessitarianism into a new intellectual framework, and it was at this opportune moment that Coleridge extolled the gospel of Spinoza.

Wordsworth found in Spinoza a theory intermediate between Godwin's mechanistic determinism and Coleridge's doctrine of free will. As Melvin Rader puts it: "As a bridge, Spinoza's philosophy enabled him to cling to his intense naturalism and social idealism while he moved towards his later libertarian convictions. Even when under Coleridge's prodding, he finally came to believe in free will, the spirit of teleological determinism lingered on." Although the poetry of Wordsworth's later years shows his divergence from Spinoza, it bears some traces of his earlier creed. Thus

Coleridge complained that the later poetry of Wordsworth still bore the mark of a 'vague, misty rather than mystic, confusion of God with Nature...while the odd introduction of the popular, almost vulgar, religion in his later publications (the popping in...of the old man with a beard), suggests the painful suspicion of worldly prudence...carried into religion. At least it conjures up to my fancy a sort of *Janus* head of Spinoza and Dr. Watts, or "I and my brother the Dean." Coleridge felt that Wordsworth had never entirely rejected the Spinozistic creed, however incongruous it might be with his later orthodoxy.

Kant

Coleridge was intensely devoted to Kant. His serious study of the Kantian philosophy began as early as March 1801, in time to affect the first version of *The Prelude* and a large body of additional poetry. Undoubtedly Kant's doctrines, as refracted through Coleridge's mind, were well known to Wordsworth, and must have been impressed upon him by many conversations. *Ode to Duty* is the most Kantian poem of Wordsworth. Here the poet invokes the 'firm support' of duty and longs 'for a repose that ever is the same':

Stern Lawgiver ! yet thou dost wear
The Godhead's most benignant grace ;
Nor know we anything so fair
As is the smile upon thy face :
Flowers laugh before thee on their beds
And fragrance in thy footing treads ;
Thou dost preserve the stars from wrong ;
And the most ancient heavens, through Thee, are fresh
and strong.

The German philosopher similarly compared the austere sublimity of the stars with the categorical imperative, and maintained that moral law is binding upon all thinking beings including God.

Kant maintained that his concept of a Kingdom of Ends was another way of formulating his conception of duty. Wordsworth has precisely summarized this doctrine that every rational creature should be treated as an end in *The Excursion* :

Our life is turned
Out of her course, wherever man is made
An offering, or a sacrifice, a tool
Or implement, a passive thing employed
As a brute mean, without acknowledgment
Of common right or interest in the end ;
Used or abused, as selfishness may prompt.
Say, what can follow for a rational soul
Perverted thus, but weakness in all good,
And strength in evil ?

Thus the poet appears to have accepted two main principles of the Kantian ethics : the categorical imperative and the doctrine of ends.

Platonism

There can be no doubt that Coleridge communicated to Wordsworth many Platonic conceptions. If we can judge from the large number of books on Platonism in the Rydal Mount library, Coleridge must have struck a sympathetic chord when he discussed Platonism with Wordsworth. The reference to Plato in Wordsworth's works are uniformly complimentary. He speaks of Plato's 'genius', his 'lore sublime', and the 'everlasting praise' that is his due. In *The Convention of Cintra* he declares that in the persons of Plato, Demosthenes, Homer, Shakespeare, Milton, and Lord Bacon 'were enshrined as much of the divinity of intellect as the inhabitants of this planet can hope will ever take up its abode among them'. He also remarked in conversation that Plato's *Phaedo*, Shakespeare's *Othello*, and Walton's *Life of George Herbert* were 'the most pathetic of human compositions'.

A careful examination of Wordsworth's poetry shows that some of his doctrines bear the Platonic stamp. In the scheme of the Platonists the universe is not only a rational universe, but God Himself is eternal Reason. The poet writes in this vein when he addresses his apostrophe to the

Wisdom and Spirit of the universe ;
Thou Soul that art the eternity of thought.

In both the *Symposium* and *Phaedrus* Plato maintains that reason is one with spiritual love. Similarly Wordsworth maintains that imagination and intellectual love are identical with 'reason in her most exalted mood'. Another favourite doctrine of the Platonists was the concept of a Soul of the World. In Plato's *Timaeus* the World Soul is made up of two levels of being, that which is undivided and always self-same, and that which is divisible in bodies. The same concept of the one and many is repeated by Plotinus, Proclus, Bruno, Eckhart, Boehme, and the Cambridge Platonists. This doctrine must have been congenial to Wordsworth. As John Jones shows in *The Egotistical Sublime*, it is characteristic of Wordsworth's genius that he is equally concerned with solitude and relationship. On the one hand, he speaks of

...the one Presence, and the Life
Of the great whole.

On the other hand, he writes

Of the individual Mind that keeps her own
Inviolat retirement.

His strong sense of oneness is combined with an equally insistent sense of individual identity :

Points have all of us within our souls
Where all stand single ; this I feel, and make
Breathings for incommunicable powers.

"Wordsworth is in vital accord with Plato in his 'intimations of immortality'. Not only did he make use, in the famous *Ode*, of the Platonic 'recollection' of pre-existence, but the entire poem follows the *Phaedo* in emphasizing the 'high instincts' by which our 'mortal Nature' appears a pensioner upon the immortal elements of the mind. To find a similar glorification of childhood 'trailing clouds of glory' we cannot do better than to read the Platonists—Proclus, Hermes Trismegistus, Henry Vaughan, Thomas Traherne, and Thomas Taylor. However, Plato himself rejects the 'wisdom' of the child in favour of the rigorously disciplined mind of the philosopher."*

Conclusion

Wordsworth was a bold and romantic thinker. He gathered ideas from many sources and adapted them freely to his own purposes. Many political thinkers and philosophers exerted their influence on Wordsworth's ideas, but he was far too great a poet to be enslaved to any political or philosophical movement. His own experience of life was by far the most important source of his ideas; next to this was the living presence of Dorothy and Coleridge; finally there was the influence of books, and among these he roamed far and wide.

Adopted many sources for his own purpose - was a bold romantic thinker -

Sources -

1. French Revolution

2. Goethe

3. Shelley

4. Coleridge

5. Spinoza

6. Newton

7. Berkeley

8. Locke

9. Rousseau

10. Kant

They directly or indirectly had an impact on Wordsworth -

* Melvin Rader, *Wordsworth—A Philosophical Approach* (Oxford University Press/London, 1967), p. 79.

*A poet above all English poets - beside Milton but a step below Shakespeare
His soul moved from doubts to certainties from troubles to triumphs*

6

Wordsworth : A General Estimate

Introduction

Wordsworth has suffered greatly from popular misconceptions and prejudices. In his life-time he was vilified and misunderstood ; poets like Byron, Shelley and Keats failed to understand him or his motives. He was suspected of apostasy, and when he became Poet Laureate he was written off as a turncoat who had played false to the ideals of his youth. "Now, common opinion regards him as a poet above all the English poets standing beside Milton, but a step below Shakespeare himself—and we know more about him, more about the processes by which his soul moved from doubts to certainties, from troubles to triumph, than we do about any other author we have. This knowledge we have from the poem called *The Prelude*, which was published after his death. It was designed to be only the opening and explanatory section of a philosophical poem, which was never completed. Had it been published earlier it would have saved Wordsworth from the coldness and neglect he suffered at the hands of younger men like Shelley ; it might even have made their work different from what it is. It has made Wordsworth very clear to us now."* *(Prelude should have saved him from misunderstanding)*

A Poet of Nature

We think of Wordsworth first as a poet of Nature, and rightly ; for, though he Concordance shows that Nature was less often his theme than Man, it is by his poetry of Nature that he is unique. Wordsworth's unique apprehension of Nature was determined by his peculiar sense-endowment. He is a poet of 'the mighty world of eye and ear'. In a poem he says of his sister Dorothy that 'she gave me eyes, she gave me ears'—the only gifts for which he had any use, "His eye, though not exceptionally quick, was at once far-seeing and penetrating ; he looked through the visible scene to what he calls its 'ideal truth', poring over objects till he fastened their images on his brain and brooding on these in memory till they acquired the

*G.H. Mair, *English Literature 1450-1900* (Oxford University Press/ London, 1969), p. 113.

liveliness of dreams ; dwelling especially on the larger features of the scene, the mountain and the deep and gloomy wood, the clouds, the sky ; enraptured above all by sunrise and sunset—it was in the sweetness of a summer dawn that he first knew himself a dedicated spirit ; and his last glimpse of the celestial light that had once apparelled the earth came to him on an evening of extraordinary splendour and beauty. He had a keen ear too for all natural sounds, the calls of beasts and birds, and the sounds of winds and waters : the 'soughing' of boughs in a high wind set his mind working, and he composed thousands of lines wandering by the side of a stream."* However, it should be noted that there are very few passages in Wordsworth's poetry which would justify us in claiming that his senses of touch, taste and smell were equally acute. 'Smooth', 'luscious', 'warm', 'fragrant'—these are no epithets for Wordsworth's poetry. His world is austere and bleak.

What distinguishes Wordsworth from other poets of Nature is that for him Nature is a living entity. The indwelling spirit in Nature imparts its own consciousness to all objects of Nature :

To every natural form, rock, fruit and flower,
Even the loose stones that cover the highway,
I gave a moral life : I saw them feel.

*nature a
living
entity -*

It was Wordsworth's aim as a poet to reveal the invisible impulses at work behind the outward beauty of Nature. Stopford Brooke rightly observes : "He (Wordsworth) conceived, as poet, that Nature was alive. It had, he imagined, one living soul which, entering into flower, stream, or mountain, gave them each a soul of their own."

Wordsworth is not merely a poet of Nature, he is a prophet of Nature ; he is concerned less to depict than to explain ; less to marvel at Nature's beauty than to exult at its inner significance. He is for ever spiritualising the moods of Nature and winning from them moral consolation. "To him nature appears as a formative influence superior to any other, the educator of senses and mind alike, the sower in our hearts of the deep-laid seeds of our feelings and beliefs. It speaks to the child in the fleeting emotions of its early years, and stirs the young poet to an ecstasy, the glow of which illuminates all his work and the rest of his life. In our temperate climes, this nature is a safe guide to wisdom and goodness ; it is instinct with the irradiating presence of the divine ; in his adoration of it, Wordsworth's creed is a mystical pantheism."**

A Poet of Man

Nature never engrossed all thoughts of Wordsworth. Many were given to man, chiefly to the feelings of man. He aspired to

* Herbert Grierson & J.C Smith, *A Critical History of English Poetry* (Penguin Books Ltd/Harmondsworth, England, 1966), p. 307.

** Emile Legouis & Louis Cazamian, *A History of English Literature* (J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd/London, 1957), p. 1010.

become a philosophical poet, whose ultimate theme was not Nature but the heart of man. Wordsworth's temper was essentially democratic. He had lived in a democratic society; at Cambridge also he found a democratic atmosphere. As he says in the *Prelude*,

.....we were brothers all
In honour as in one community,
Scholars and gentlemen.

} Democratic Society
at Cambridge

In this connexion Carlos Baker aptly says, "Emerson, the prophet of democratic vistas, helps to make us aware of yet another source of Wordsworth's strength and stature. It is that, like another giant named Antaeus, he believes that the poet must keep his feet on the ground, deriving substance and sustenance from his mother, the earth. The politics of Antaeus are unknown, but no one can read Wordsworth for very long without the conviction that at the deeper levels his democracy never wavers. In passages like those relating to Beaupuy in the ninth book of *The Prelude*, his political views come to the surface; later on, as we know, those views were subject to some adjustment in the direction of conservatism. Yet the adjustment does not affect the basic tenet of his democratic faith; few modern poets have embodied in their work, whether by statement or by implication, so firm a sense of the dignity or worth of the common individual man." (The ideals of the French Revolution were in his very blood, and the Revolution in its first stage seemed to him no portent for good or evil but rather the tardy return of a society to its stable equilibrium.) He lost his faith in the Revolution as a political creed, but its effect remained intact on his mind. The French Revolution humanized Wordsworth's soul and built him into a poet of man. It took him away from contemplation of his own soul to live in hope for mankind, to proclaim his faith in and seek the love of mankind. In his later years he became a conservative, but his belief in the basic ideals of the French Revolution remained unshaken to the end of his life.

F.R.
humanizing
his soul to
make him
more -

The French Revolution taught the poet that every human being was intrinsically great, and capable of infinite development. In his wanderings on the country roads he came in contact with the humblest human beings. Their strength and energy surprised him. As Helen Darbishire puts it: "The power that surprised him in tramps and beggars and outcast women was not the thing that Godwin valued in man. It was feeling, not reason that Wordsworth found when he groped to the bottom. The elementary feelings, the essential passions of the heart are at their purest and simplest, he found, in humble and rustic life. These are the powers in human nature which are like the primal energies of Nature: their strength, force, and beauty seem to spring from the same source; through them man and Nature are one. This was his discovery. When he reached this truth, and it remained truth for him to the end, his mind had recovered its tone, his imagination was released, and the

poetry of the *Lyrical Ballads* and the *Lines composed above Tintern Abbey* followed."

Of men and women as individuals Wordsworth has much to say, within a certain range. The city proletariat lay beyond his ken ; it was not for him to sing

the fierce confederate storm
Of sorrow barricaded evermore
Within the walls of cities

*City Proletariat
Outside his ken*

but rather

To hear humanity in woods and groves
Pipe solitary anguish.

Inside life

Wordsworth's knowledge of peasant ways and of the peasant character was gained by patient investigation. "He believed in them and he admired them, and with the passion of a scientist he collects eagerly facts and traits that may help him to build up his portraits ; and it is ever one thing he is on the look-out for—something to inspire man's higher faculties. He watches men and women with the expectant gaze of a man who is looking for some particular attitude or posture which he is anxious to portray. No doubt by this method he missed a great deal of rich human material, but he is a moralist at heart, with one steady purpose in view, and leaving aside much that was fascinating and perplexing, he contents himself with a few broad, simple issues ; and there at his best, he exhibits a massive splendour of compelling power."*

A man too old to ply a hatchet, a woman forsaken by her husband, an idiot sent at night to fetch a physician, a leech-gatherer bent double by age, a ruined shepherd, a blind boy with a passion for adventure, a little girl who has lost her cloak, a beggar, a pedlar, a tinker—these are the persons whom Wordsworth has celebrated in his poetry without condescension. The poems in which these persons appear reveal the spirit of calm fortitude, dignity and sublimity in the midst of poverty and suffering. Wordsworth reveals the innate beauty and dignity in the life of the common man in these poems. As Stopford Brooke puts it, "Wordsworth was the first English poet who made us feel that God was with simple men and women, that in their lives were profound lessons ; that a spirit of independence and stern liberty is the birth right and the passion of the poorest shepherd as well as of the patriots who fill the pages of history."

A Poet of Human Growth

Wordsworth's most persistent theme is growth. The theme of such well known poems as *Expostulation and Reply*, *The Tables Turned*, *Lines written in Early Spring*, *To My Sister, Tintern Abbey*, and *Immortality Ode* is human growth. The poet wishes to show how

* Arthur Compton-Rickett, *A History of English Literature* (Thomas Nelson & Sons Ltd/London, 1963), pp. 310-11.

the human mind develops through sense experience and reflection—Locke's two great 'fountains' of empirical knowledge. The sub-title of *The Prelude*, his most intricate exploration of the subject, is 'Growth of a Poet's Mind'. As Carlos Baker says, "He undertook it partly as a practice poem, a way of learning to handle blank verse, but mainly as an exercise in understanding on the Socratic principle, 'Know thyself'." "Fair seedtime had my soul", says the poet. Its growth had been 'fostered alike by beauty and by fear'. The milder discipline of 'beauty' informs such lines as those on the river Derwent, winding among its 'grassy holms' with ceaseless calm music like a lullaby. The discipline of fear is embodied in the trap-robbing and boat-stealing episodes. Wordsworth is aware, of course, that Nature has no moral ideas. Natural scenes like the grassy Derwent riverbank or the black peak played a 'needful part' in the development of his mind simply by having been there on occasions afterwards recognized as crucial. What gave them significance was the condition of mind with which they entered into permanent association. Natural scenes, taken in their intricate totality, often awakened in Wordsworth 'the visionary power.'

Once he tells us how he stood, for shelter from an approaching storm, under a brow of rock, listening to 'the ghostly language of the ancient earth'.

Thence did I drink the visionary power ;
And deem not profitless those fleeting moods
Of shadowy exultation : not for this
That they are kindred to our purer mind
And intellectual life : but that the soul,
Remembering how she felt, but what she felt
Remembering not, retains an obscure sense
Of possible sublimity, whereto
With growing faculties she doth aspire,
With faculties still growing, feeling still
That whatsoever point they gain, they yet
Have something to pursue.

The poet describes dozens of these natural scenes, not for themselves but for what his mind could learn through the stimuli they offered. This one provided a distant prospect up the way he knew he must go. Often, at such times, the poet seems to catch with his mind's eye 'gleams like the flashing of a shield'.

In many poems Wordsworth has employed the double-exposure technique because he is interested in the stages of growth. He often juxtaposes two widely separated periods of time in such a way that we are made dramatically conscious of the degree of growth that has taken place between Stage One and Stage Two. It resembles the effect that might be produced by our seeing a double exposure on photographic film, where the same person appears in the same setting, except that ten years have elapsed between exposures. In *Tintern Abbey*, for example, the light in the eyes of his sister seems

to reflect for the poet the very set of mind with which, five years before, he had exulted over the beauties of this quiet rural scene beside the river Wye. Addressing his sister, Wordsworth says, "I behold in thee what I was once." As he overlooks the rural scene once more, with the mental landscape of the past still in his purview, he is made doubly aware of a sense of the loss and a sense of compensation greater than the loss. It is interesting to note that it is the collection of two separate 'spots of time' which dramatizes for the poet the degree and kind of his growth in the intervening period. The same principle is at work in such famous poems as *The two April Mornings*, *She was a phantom of delight*, *Composed upon Westminster Bridge*, *Immortality Ode*, *Ode to Duty*, and *Elegias Stanzas suggested by a Picture of Peele Castle*.

As Carlos Baker puts it : "The examination of these poems leads at last to an explanation of the elegiac tone which overlies or penetrates so much of the work of this lyricist of human growth. Regret, a certain kind of lamentation, does battle with joy, a certain kind of paean for the blessings of this life, and the joy tends, on the whole, to win out. The regret is for things lost : a vision of immortality in youth, an absolute sense of nature's ultimate beneficence, an unchartered freedom, or (it may be) a daughter, or the 'phantom of delight' one's wife was when first she gleamed upon the sight. At the same time Wordsworth accepts, not only without demur or sentimental self-pity but also with positive joy, those substitutes which life makes for the early raptures."

A Poet of Love

Love of poetry appeals to our hearts -

Wordsworth is a great love-poet. His love poetry readily appeals to our hearts. As a critic puts it : "Spenser made a wonderful fusion between concrete and abstract love, Shelley displayed in his poetry the best of the Platonic love, Browning added the most grotesque element in his love poetry and Byron mixed the furious spirit in his love poems ; but none of them has reached so near to the chambers of our heart as the homeliness of Wordsworth's love poetry." As a poet of love Wordsworth does not confine himself to the treatment of passions or love between two young lovers. Most of his love poems are curiously sexless. As Grierson and Smith put it : "Wordsworth is not a love-poet in the usual sense. He was not incapable of passion, but except in *Vaudracour and Julia* he eschewed it as a theme for poetry. The Lucy poems breathe a deep and tender affection, but they are not passionate.

The love which moved Wordsworth to poetry was not sexual passion, but love of country, family, and friends. In Wordsworth family affection was a passion, even a tragic passion ; in Dorothy's words, he had 'a violence of affection' : his brother's death almost over-whelmed him ; the death of his second boy aged him by ten years ; Dora's death broke his heart. It was his violence of affection that enabled him to enter into, and render with unequalled power, the

love of father for son, of brother for brother, of mother for child, in *Michael*, *The Brothers*, and *The Affliction of Margaret*.

The central theme of Wordsworth's poems of incidents in human life is love, the workings of love, its power to inflict the deepest wounds and to heal the most irreparable. Love is the theme of poems such as *Goody Blake and Harry Gill*, *Simon Lee*, *The Thorn*, *The Last of the Flock*, *The Mad Mother*, *The Idiot Boy*, and *The Complaint of a Forsaken Indian Woman*. Love not as passion in the narrow sense of the word but passionate affection, its 'wily subtleties and refluxes', this is what Wordsworth is in quest of in and finer poems—*Michael*, *The Brothers*, *Margaret*, *The Affliction* later of *Margreat*, *Ruth*, *The Happy Warrior*, *The White Doe of Rylstone*; and to these should be added the stories narrated by the Parson in *The Excursion*, and yet more the patriotic sonnets. Sympathy with his fellow-men and desire for their welfare—that is the key-note of all his poetry, the source and inspiration of the joy of which he sings :

Love now a universal birth
From heart to heart is stealing.

And you must love him ere to you
He will seem worthy of your love.

"He has neither the impatience of Shelley nor the intellectuality of Milton"

and of the pathos of *The Ruined Cottage*, of *Michael*, of *The Brothers*, of *The Affliction of Margaret*. "Wordsworth we think of principally as a poet of Nature, but that is an incomplete view. He is, at the centre, one of the great poets of love. With Shelley he finds in love the ultimate solution of the problem of life; but he has not Shelley's impatience, nor Milton's intellectuality."*

A Poet of Child Life

Like Blake, Wordsworth is a great poet of child-life. He had a mystic conception of childhood. He focussed his attention not on the seemingly innocent external appearance of the child but on some mystical element in his care-free existence. His interest in child-life is evident in poems like *We are Seven*, *There was a Boy*, *The Idiot Boy*, *Alice Fell*, *The Immortality Ode*, *The Prelude-Books I & II*, *Lucy Gray*, and *The Cuckoo*. Poem after poem describes the joy that Wordsworth found in child-life till he burst out in lyrical raptures in *It is a beauteous evening, calm and free :*

Dear Child ! dear Girl ! that walkest with me here,
If thou appear untouched by solemn thought,
Thy nature is not therefore less divine :
Thou liest in Abraham's bosom all the year ;
And worshipp'st at the Temple's inner shrine,
God being with thee when we know it not.

* Sir Herbert J. C. Grierson, *Milton & Wordsworth—Poets and Prophets* (Chatto & Windus/London, 1956), p. 182.

This interest in child mind is a part of the cult derived from Rousseau.

In many ways Wordsworth was an extraordinary child. In the first two books of *The Prelude* he analyses his childhood memories and draws valuable lessons from them. Recollecting his childhood in *The Prelude Book I*, the poet says,

even then I felt
Gleams like the flashing of a shield ; the earth
A common face of Nature spake to me
Rememberable things ; sometimes, 'tis true,
By chance collisions and quaint accidents
(Like those ill-sorted unions, works supposed
Of evil-minded fairies), yet not vain
Nor profitless, if haply they impressed
Collateral objects and appearances,
Albeit lifeless, then, and doomed to sleep
Until maturer seasons called them forth
To impregnate and to elevate the mind.

In lines 233-265 of *The Prelude Book II* the child's creative faculty and imagination are exalted :

Blest the infant Babe,
(For with my best conjecture I would trace
Our being's earthly progress) blest the Babe,
Nursed in his Mother's arms, who sinks to sleep
Rocked on his Mother's breast ; who with his soul
Drinks in the feelings of his Mother's eye ;
For him, in one dear Presence, there exists
A virtue which irradiates and exalts
Objects through widest intercourse of sense ;
No outcast he, bewildered and depressed :
Along his infant veins are interfused
The gravitation and the filial bond
Of nature that connect him with the world.
Is there a flower, to which he points with hand
Too weak to gather it, already love
Drawn from love's purest earthly fount for him
Hath beautified that flower ; already shades
Of pity cast from inward tenderness
Do fall around him upon aught that bears
Unightly marks of violence or harm.
Emphatically such a Being lives,
Frail creature as he is, helpless as frail,
An inmate of this active universe :
For feeling has to him imparted power
That through the growing faculties of sense
Doth like an agent of the one great Mind
Create, creator and receiver both,
Working but in alliance with the works

Which it beholds—Such, verily, is the first
Poetic spirit of our human life,
By uniform control of after years,
In most, abated or suppressed ; in some,
Through every change of growth and of decay,
Pre-eminent till death.

Wordsworth's philosophical attitude towards childhood is best presented in the *Immortality Ode*. As Raleigh puts it : "It was not by an acquaintance with Platonic philosophy that he arrived at his glorification of childhood, but by looking at nature and life with an open mind." In this great Ode the poet does not depict the child as

Mewling and puking in the nurse's arm
but as a

Mighty Prophet ! Seer blest !
On whom those truths do rest,
Which we are toiling all our lives to find.

In his child-poems Wordsworth glorifies children because for him 'they are the very image of God brought up in natural surroundings'. His glorification of childhood has provoked a good deal of controversy. But we should remember that Wordsworth was a poet and not a philosopher, and hence his conception of childhood is poetic and mystical rather than philosophical.

A Poet of Solitude *Solitude and Solitary things have fascinations*
Core Kemo -

Wordsworth is pre-eminently the poet of solitude. All solitude and all solitary things had an extraordinary fascination for Wordsworth.

The outward shows of sky and earth,
Of hill and valley, he has viewed ;
And impulses of deeper birth
Have come to him in solitude.

The poet himself 'wanders lonely as a Cloud' : he seeks the 'souls of lonely places' : he listens in awe to

One voice, the solitary raven...
An iron knell, with echoes from afar:
against the distant sky he describes the shepherd.

A solitary object and sublime,
Above all height ! like an aerial cross
Stationed alone upon a spiry rock
Of the Chartreuse, for worship.

Milton's Solitude is active - Wordsworth's is passive -

Like Milton, Wordsworth introduced solitary figures in his poetry. But there is a difference between them : Milton's are active, Wordsworth's are passive. Milton's are in revolt ; Wordsworth's are in—what are they in ? They are not in revolt ; they are not entirely in acceptance, at least they are not in willing and

exalted acceptance. They express—or some of them do—a trust in God. But this is secondary, even where it occurs, and it does not always occur. As Charles William puts it: "They communicate a strange sensation of semi-mystical fear; they rise before us in that verse, as shapes partly of terror, partly of sympathy, wholly of mystery. Examples are the soldier at the end of Book IV of the *Prelude*; the beggar in Book VII (11. 635-49); the girl in Book XII (11. 248-61); 'the single sheep, and the one blasted tree' also in Book XII (11. 292-302. 317-23); the Leech Gatherer; Margaret (in the *Affliction of Margaret* though here the solitary figure speaks); the old Cumberland Beggar; the Solitary Reaper. These are the most striking among many solitudes; there are many others of less apparent significance—Lucy Gray is one—whose ghost

sings a solitary song
That whistles in the wind:

Margaret in the First Book of the *Excursion*, and other figures scattered through that poem; the Shepherd at the end of *Michael*; Leonard in the *Brothers*; the Forsaken Indian Woman; *Ruth*—all these, and more, sing their own solitary songs or preserve their solitary silences. And around them is that third circle which is only by accident solitary—the flowers and birds whom Wordsworth names singly, the Skylark, the Daisy, the Lesser Celandine, the Swan on still Saint Mary's lake, the Linnet, the Butterfly. Add the solitude of Lucy and the recurrent solitude of Wordsworth himself, and the groups will be sufficiently presented."

Wordsworth's solitary figures arouse in us a sense of our own capacity for solitude and endurance. It is such things as those that make part of Wordsworth's greatness, confirming his instinctive claim to be part of our philosophic mind. If the Leech gatherer and the soldier on the moon-lit road had not been solitary figures, they would not have awaked 'the visionary power'. As Bradley says, "To call a thing lonely or solitary is, with him, to say that it opens a bright or solemn vista into infinity."

It is interesting to note that the solitariness which exerted so potent a spell on Wordsworth had in it nothing 'Byronic'. He preached in *The Excursion* against the solitude of 'self-indulging spleen'. He was even aware that he himself, though free from that bad habit, had felt

perhaps too much
The self-sufficing power of Solitude.

A Didactic Poet to generalise experiences and draw his own conclusions.

Wordsworth is a didactic poet. He had a tendency to generalize his experiences and to draw moral lessons from them so as to ensure that the reader did not miss the point. He once wrote to his friend Sir George Beaumont, "Every great poet is a teacher: I wish either to be considered as a teacher or as nothing." In one of his

letters to Lady Beaumont the poet observed : "There is scarcely one of my poems which does not aim to direct the attention to some moral sentiment or to some general principle or law of thought, or of our intellectual constitution. He pointed out that his aim in writing poetry was 'to console the afflicted, to add sunshine to daylight by making the happy happier, to teach the young and the gracious of every age to see, to think and feel, and, therefore, to become more actively and securely virtuous'."

A careful study of Wordsworth's poems shows that he seeks to impart to his reader a set of moral lessons. The first teaching of Wordsworth is that man should approach Nature in the right mood, which is defined as a mood of 'wise passiveness' with a 'heart that watches and receives'. Wisdom, truth, joy and peace are qualities that exist outside of man and may pass into his life from Nature, if he approaches it in a mood of 'wise passiveness'. From Nature man can get moral lessons—'

One impulse from a vernal wood
May teach you more of man,
Of moral evil and of good,
Than all the sages can.

Wordsworth gives the message of a moral and virtuous life in his poetry. In *The Character of the Happy Warrior* he explains the mode in which a grand character can be formed. According to Wordsworth the secret of happiness in life is that one must perform one's duty under all circumstances. As he says in *Ode to Duty*,

Serene will be our days and bright,
And happy will our nature be,
When love is an unerring light,
And joy its own security.

Wordsworth's most significant message to humanity is the message of 'plain living and high thinking'. He wishes his readers to become

Type of the wise who soar, but never roam ;
True to the kindred points of Heaven and Home !

The poet warns his countrymen of the evils of worldliness :

The world is too much with us ; late and soon,
Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers,
Little we see in Nature that is ours.

He believes that even a superstitious veneration of the forces of Nature is better than apathy born of absorption in materials things.

Wordsworth's poems have great moral value. As Legouis says, "The *Lyrical Ballads* and the poems of the same group are a series of moral analyses of a rich intrinsic value, discreetly guided by edifying and utilitarian purpose." To many of his readers Wordsworth has given a glimpse of 'truths that wake to perish never' ; while

even to those for whom his mysticism carries no inspiration there are touches like this, splendid in its stoical fortitude.

We men that in our morn of youth defied
The elements,—must vanish ; be it so !—

A Philosophical Poet *(a philosopher and not poetical philosopher)*

Wordsworth is a philosophical poet, and not a poetical philosopher. This implies that the poet's faith was based on intuitions rather than on processes of reasoning. His friend Coleridge may have defined for him the philosophical problem ; but the solution came in such flashes as that which fell upon his vision when he reached the crest of Snowdon, and saw that 'universal spectacle', 'shaped' for his 'admiration and delight'. He was not lost in cloudy abstractions. He had his feet firmly on the ground, and it was his preference for human contacts, for 'men as they are men within themselves', which caused him to reject the philosophies which are 'bottom'd on false thought'.

"There are in our world currents of thought that are central, and others that are merely tributaries, or wander off into the bogs and deserts of philosophy. That stream which first became defined in Kant's philosophy, and continued to flow however irregularly through the minds of Schelling, Coleridge, Kierkegaard, Hegel, Nietzsche, Husserl, Heidegger, divided by a watershed from the contrary stream to which we can attach the names of Locke, Condillac, Hartley, Bentham, Marx and Lenin—that first stream to which we give the fashionable name of Existentialism, but which is really the main tradition of philosophy itself—in that stream Wordsworth is confidently carried. Other poets of his time and since his time may give us keener thrills of pure aesthetic pleasure. Wordsworth can move us in that way, too, but his singular distinction is the centrality and traditional validity of his philosophical faith."* We turn to Wordsworth's poetry for something more lasting than pleasure, and for something more human than beauty. We turn to Wordsworth

For that which moves with light and life informed
Actual divine, and true.

This faith the poet ascribed

To fear and love,
To love as first and chief, for there fear ends...
...to early intercourse,
In presence of sublime and lovely forms :
With the adverse principles of pain and joy...
By love,...
...all grandeur comes,

*Herbert Read, *The True Voice of Feeling* (Faber and Faber/London, 1954), pp. 210-11.

All truth and beauty, from pervading love ;
That gone, we are as dust.

But this 'intellectual' love, as Wordsworth calls it in 1805, or 'spiritual' love as he calls it in 1850, cannot exist without Imagination :

another name for absolute strength
And clearest insight, amplitude of mind,
And reason in her most exalted mood.

Love of this kind is but another name for *das Umgreifende* : the experience of the Comprehensive, that faculty which enabled Wordsworth to

tread on shadowy ground, to sink
Deep—and, aloft ascending, breathe in worlds
To which the heaven of heavens is but a veil.

Wordsworth is the first among the philosophic poets of the Romantic Movement. His place is with Coleridge and Shelley, with Holderlin and Novalis, and with Leopardi. His philosophic faith cannot be formally related to Kant or Schelling, as can Coleridge's : it is too personal, too home-spun. But it belongs to the same climate of thought, and through the channel of Coleridge's mind, had direct access to the prevalent winds of doctrine.

An Evangelist (*brought consolation to a time of dereliction and dismay*)

Wordsworth's extraordinary success in bringing consolation to a 'time of dereliction and dismay' has given him a status below only Shakespeare and Milton.

Arnold asked in *Memorial Verses*,

Where will Europe's latter hour
Again find Wordsworth's healing power ?

Leslie Stephen held that 'Wordsworth is the only poet who will bear reading in time of distress', and that his persistent concern with the possibility of transmuting sorrow into strength is 'the single topic which...can really be called consolatory'. What Wordsworth does, said John Morley, 'is to assuage, to reconcile, to fortify...to give us quietness'. More than this Wordsworth in the Prospectus had undertaken to 'arouse the sensual from their sleep', 'Of death ; and his autobiographical poem *The Prelude* begins with the claim that he is 'singled out, as it might seem, /For holy services' and ends with the behest to Coleridge to carry on with him, as a prophet of Nature and of the mind of man, the work of men's 'redemption, surely yet to come'. Now a question arises : To what extent did Wordsworth succeed as an evangelist of Nature and mind ?

The poet's first recorded success was with his friend Coleridge. When in January 1807 Coleridge, sunk in spiritual torpor, first heard the poet read *The Prelude* through, he recorded the event in the ode *To William Wordsworth*, a remarkable summary of that 'more than historic, that prophetic lay' as it appeared to one who had played an important part in its genesis. As Coleridge listened, it

effected in him an unmistakable, if temporary, passage from the sleep of death back to life :

Ah ! as I listened with a heart forlorn,
The pulses of my being beat anew :
And even as Life returns upon the drowned,
Life's joy rekindling roused a throng of pains
Keen pangs of Love, awakening as a babe
Turbulent, with an outcry in the heart.

At the age of twenty, John Stuart Mill fell into a sudden and total apathy and anomie. His introduction to Wordsworth's collective *Poems* of 1815 gave him great relief from his 'dry heavy dejection'. The poems were 'a medicine', says Mill, 'for my state of mind', because they represented the interchange between Nature and mind. *The Autobiography of Mark Rutherford* is the semi-fictional account of his own life by William Hale White, who broke free from evangelicalism by a reverse form of the conversion experience which was central to evangelical piety. The book was written before *The Prelude* was published, and the immediate agency for White's experience was an encounter with Wordsworth's *Lyrical Ballads*. In Wordsworth, White said, 'God is nowhere formally deposed'; yet the deity in a personal form has faded away, leaving his attributes to be assimilated by Nature, which is then confronted by a mind with an appropriately altered attitude :

Instead of an object of worship which was altogether artificial, remote...God was brought from that heaven of the books, and dwelt on the downs in the far-away distances, and in every cloud-shadow which wandered across the valley. Wordsworth unconsciously did for me what every religious reformer has done,—he re-created my Supreme Divinity.

That the power of Wordsworth's evangel has not in our age been exhausted is shown by Bede Griffiths' autobiography *The Golden String* published in the 1950s. The writer tells us in his Prologue that one of the decisive events of his life occurred on an evening of his last term at school, when the chorus of birds, the sight of Hawthorns in full bloom, the soar and song of a lark struck him with a surprise as great as though he 'had been brought suddenly among the trees of the Garden of Paradise'. 'It was as though I had begun to see and smell and hear for the first time. The world appeared to me as Wordsworth describes it with 'the glory and the freshness of a dream'," and Nature 'began to wear a kind of sacramental character for me.' As time went on this kind of worship began to take the place of any other religion. The romantic poets became his teachers, and he gradually gave up his adherence to any form of Christianity. Among the romantic prophets of a 'new religion', he later makes clear, Wordsworth was *facile princeps*.

"The religion of Wordsworth, as I found it expressed in the 'Prelude' and in the 'Lines Written Above Tintern Abbey' had a

deeper meaning for me than anything else I had ever known, because it came nearer to my own experience."

"All process, Romantic thinkers believed, moves forward and also rounds back. Wordsworth's absorption of the personal God into a sacramental nature in communion with an apotheosized faculty of mind, which had resolved his own crisis and assisted other men to resolve theirs, and which had converted Mill from Benthamism and William Hale White from Augustinianism, now helped put Bede Griffiths on the way back to the prototype of the mind's religious colloquy with nature."*

A Mystic *(mysticism is a temper rather than a doctrine - it is not at all systematic philosophy of life)*

Mysticism is a temper rather than a doctrine, an atmosphere rather than a systematic philosophy of life. The basis of mysticism is the firm belief in a world of divine reality behind and within the ordinary world of sense perception. To the mystic there is 'one undivided changeless life in all lives', and he believes that 'all things in the visible world are but forms and manifestations of the one divine life, and that these phenomena are changing and temporary; while the soul that informs them is eternal'.

Wordsworth was a mystic in the true sense of the term. As Caroline Spurgeon puts it : "Wordsworth was not only a poet, he was also a seer and a mystic and a practical psychologist with an amazingly subtle mind and an unusual capacity for feeling. It was not the beauty of Nature which brought him joy and peace, but the life in Nature. He himself had caught a vision of that life. He knew it and felt it, and it transformed the whole of the existence for him. He believed that every man could attain this vision which he so fully possessed and his whole life's work took a form of minute and careful analysis of the process of feeling in his own nature." Indeed, mysticism is a fundamental and pervading element in his thought. In his great poems like *Tintern Abbey* and *Immortality Ode* the mystic note is very strong. The faith that divine spirit is present both in the objects of Nature and in the mind of man is mystically expressed by the poet in *Tintern Abbey* :

And I have felt
A presence that disturbs me with the joy
Of elevated thoughts ; a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused,
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
And the round ocean and the living air,
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man :
A motion and a spirit, that impels
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
And rolls through all things.

divine spirit is present in objects of nature and in the mind of man.

* M.H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism* (W.W. Norton & Company Inc/ New York, 1971), pp. 139-40.

Wordsworth's mystic conception of childhood is expressed in the *Immortality Ode* :

Thou, whose exterior semblance doth belie
Thy soul's immensity ;
Thou best Philosopher, who yet dost keep
Thy heritage, thou Eye among the blind,
That, deaf and silent, read'st the eternal deep,
Haunted for ever by the eternal mind,—

Mighty Prophet ! Seer blest !
On whom those truths do rest,
Which we are toiling all our lives to find.

As Wordsworth was a mystic, the super-sensuous world appeared to him more real than the world of sense-perception. So in this great ode he attaches much importance to

...those obstinate questionings
Of sense and outward things,
Fallings from us, vanishings,
Blank misgivings of a Creature
Moving about in worlds not realised,
High instincts before which our mortal Nature
Did tremble like a guilty Thing surprised.

Wordsworth was a mystic ; but he differed from other mystics in one important respect : he did never regard the material world as meaningless. In his poetry the spiritual meaning was added to the natural beauty, not substituted for it. "Wordsworth's poetry is essentially mystical. But whereas the mysticism of other men consists commonly in their effort to escape from the senses, the mysticism of Wordsworth is grounded and rooted, actually, in the senses. The natural world speaks, not to the intellect, but to that in us which is most 'natural', viz. our senses. It is only when we allow reason, or intellect, to confuse the clear and sweet report of the senses that we cease to see visions, and from being poets become mere men again. It is our eyes and our ears that matter to us ; it is by them that we become wise and immortal—as soon as we begin to think, we join the foolish or the dead. If Wordsworth does not go so far as to tell us that 'the soul is—but the senses catching fire', he at least comes near to hinting it."*

His Theory of Poetry and Poetic Diction

Wordsworth's theory of poetry and poetic diction was elucidated in the Prefaces to the *Lyrical Ballads*. These Prefaces, when analysed, resolve into certain declarations about the aims of poetry, others concerning the methods by which these aims are to be fulfilled, and certain corollaries dependent on these axioms. The main

* H.W. Garrod, *Wordsworth : Lectures and Essays* (Oxford University Press/London, 1939), p. 105.

object, as laid down in the 1802 Preface, is 'to choose incidents and situations from common life and to relate and describe them, throughout, as far as possible, in a selection of language really used by men'. According to Wordsworth, the purpose of poetry is to develop feeling out of the ideas surviving from the sensations of daily life. "I sing," Wordsworth declared in the Proem to *The Recluse*—

Of Truth, of Grandeur, Beauty, Love and Hope,
And melancholy Fear subdued by Faith ;
Of blessed consolations in distress ;
Of moral strength, and intellectual Power ;
Of joy in widest commonalty spread ;
Of the individual Mind that keeps her own
Inviolat retirement...

Such are the values to be revealed by the poet : the methods by which he is to achieve this purpose are no less clearly defined in the Prefaces. *Phraseology to be replaced by real language of men* —

As regards poetic diction, Wordsworth said that the gaudiness and inane phraseology of eighteenth century poetic diction were to be rejected in favour of a selection of the real language of men in a state of vivid sensation. To his general intention, which was to adopt the very language of men for the purposes of poetic composition, he made two qualifications. That very language was to be the heightened language of men in a state of vivid sensation—that is to say, language removed from every suggestion of triviality ; and furthermore only a selection of that language was to be adopted. The immediate object of this rigorous selection was realistic : "I wish," Wordsworth said, "to keep my Reader in the company of flesh and blood." *Good poetry is overflow of powerful feelings* —

Another important subject was touched on in the Prefaces : the actual psychology of inspiration. Wordsworth observes that 'all good poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings' ; but he goes on to say, 'though this be true, Poems to which any value can be attached, were never produced on any variety of subjects but by a man, who being possessed of more than usual organic sensibility, had also thought long and deeply. For our continued influxes of feeling are modified and directed by our thoughts, which are indeed the representatives of all our past feelings'. Wordsworth elaborates this general statement by defining more closely the actual process of poetical inspiration. "Poetry", he says, "takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity." He then goes on to trace the course of poetry from this moment of origin. For, next, 'the emotion is contemplated till by a species of reaction the tranquillity gradually disappears, and an emotion, kindred to that which was before the subject of contemplation, is gradually produced, and does itself actually exist in the mind. In this mood successful composition generally begins, and in a mood similar to this it is carried on'. Therefore, the process has four stages : recollection, contemplation, recrudescence, and composition.

"To pass from these Prefaces of 1800 and 1802, to the Preface to the Poems of 1815 and the Essay Supplementary thereto, is to pass from the realistic theories of a poet in full vitality, to the pedantic after-thoughts of a poet already jealous of his own past. The Preface is mainly devoted to a defence of that schematic division of his poems which he then adopted and which has done more than anything else to hinder a true appreciation of his genius; and to a discussion of Imagination and Fancy, the twin humbugs of romantic criticism... Imagination is not a word we can dispense with, but Dryden's word, invention, is more exact, and can be distinguished as either logical or illogical according as to whether it proceeds from conscious or subconscious association. Psychology does not need any other terms, nor does criticism. The Essay Supplementary to the Preface of 1815 is interesting for its reflections on the history of English poetry, but otherwise is little more than a petulant defence of the poems from the unjust attacks of contemporary critics... For Wordsworth's effective contributions to the theory of poetry, we need not go further than the Preface of 1802, which indeed shows his mind in the vigour of its maturity."*

His Excellences

Poet of austere purity - both grammatically and logically -

Wordsworth's first excellence as a poet is an austere purity of language both grammatically and logically. In his poetry there is a perfect appropriateness of the words to the meaning. In this connexion Coleridge observes: "I am far however from denying that we have poets whose general style possesses the same excellence as Mr. Moore, Lord Byron, Mr. Bowles, and, in all his later and more important works, our laurel-honouring Laureate. But there are none, in whose works I do not appear to myself to find more exceptions than in those of Wordsworth."

Sanity of Thought.

The second characteristic excellence of Wordsworth's poetry is a correspondent weight and sanity of the thoughts and sentiments, won not from books, but from the poet's own meditative observation. His thoughts and sentiments are fresh, and have the dew upon them. Even among his smaller poems there is scarcely one which is not rendered valuable by some just and original reflection. Thus there is a fresh thought even in the last stanza of the poem on the withered Celandine:

To be a prodigal's favourite—then, worse truth,
A miser's pensioner—behold our lot!
O man! that from thy fair and shining youth
Age might but take the things youth needed not.

The third characteristic excellence of Wordsworth's poetry is 'the sinewy strength and originality of single lines and paragraphs—the frequent *curiosa felicitas* of his diction'. In order to illustrate this point we may quote the following:

* Herbert Read, *Wordsworth* (Faber & Faber Ltd/London, 1949), p. 113.

The river glideth at his own sweet will

(Westminster Bridge)

The soul was like a star and dwelt apart (London 1802)

The Child is father of the Man (The Rainbow)

The still sad music of humanity (Tintern Abbey)

The fourth sovereign quality of Wordsworth is 'the perfect truth of nature in his images and descriptions, as taken immediately from nature, and proving a long and genial intimacy with the very spirit which gives the physiognomic expression to all the works of nature'. The description of skating in *The Prelude Book I* is a fine example of it :

So through the darkness and the cold we flew,
And not a voice was idle : with the din
Meanwhile the precipices rang aloud ;
The leafless trees and every icy crag
Tinkled like iron ; while the distant hills
Into the tumult sent an alien sound
Of melancholy, not unnoticed, while the stars
Eastward were sparking clear, and in the west
The orange sky of evening died away.

The fifth characteristic excellence of Wordsworth's poetry is 'a meditative pathos, a union of deep and subtle thought with sensibility ; a sympathy with man as man ; the sympathy indeed of a contemplator, rather than a fellow-sufferer or co-mate (spectator, *haud particeps*) but of a contemplator, from whose view no difference of rank conceals the sameness of the nature ; no injuries of wind or weather, or toil, or even of ignorance, wholly disguise the human face divine'. As Coleridge aptly says, "The superscription and the image of the Creator still remain legible to him under the dark lines, with which guilt or calamity had cancelled or cross-barred it." Here the man and the poet lose and find themselves in each other, the one as glorified, the latter as substantiated. In this mild and philosophic pathos, Wordsworth appears to me without a compeer." Poems like *Michael*, *The Old Cumberland Beggar*, and *Resolution and Independence* finely bring out this aspect of Wordsworth's poetry.

Lastly, Wordsworth has the gift of imagination in the highest and strictest sense of the word. In imaginative power he stands nearest of all modern writers to Shakespeare and Milton ; and yet in a kind perfectly unborrowed and his own. We may cite the following passage from the poem on the Yew Trees as most obviously manifesting this faculty :

But worthier still of note
Are those fraternal four of Borrowdale,
Joined in one solemn and capacious grove :
Huge trunks !—and each particular trunk a growth
Of intertwined fibres serpentine

Up-coiling, and inveterately convolved—
 Not uninformed with phantasy, and looks
 That threaten the profane ;—a pillared shade,
 Upon whose grassless floor of red-brown hue,
 By sheddings from the pinal umbrage tinged
 Perennially—beneath whose sable roof
 Of boughs, as if for festal purpose decked
 With unrejoicing berries, ghostly shapes
 May meet at noontide.—FEAR and trembling HOPE,
 SILENCE and FORESIGHT—DEATH, the skeleton,
 And TIME, the shadow—there to celebrate,
 As in a natural temple scattered o'er
 With altars undisturbed of mossy stone,
 United worship ; or in mute repose
 To lie, and listen to the mountain flood
 Murmuring from Glaramara's inmost caves.

His Defects

The first characteristic defect of Wordsworth as a poet is a matter-of-factness in certain poems. As Coleridge says, "This may be divided into, *first*, a laborious minuteness and fidelity in the representation of objects, and their positions, as they appeared to the poet himself ; *secondly*, the insertion of accidental circumstances, in order to the full explanation of his living characters, their dispositions and actions ; which circumstances might be necessary to establish the probability of a statement in real life, where nothing is taken for granted by the hearer, but appear superfluous in poetry, where the reader is willing to believe for his own sake." This matter-of-factness is due mainly to the extra-ordinary infatuation of Wordsworth for the quality of truth in his poetry. The following passage is a good example of it :

I think of CHATTERTON, the marvellous boy,
 The sleepless soul, that perished in his pride ;
 Of BURNS, that walk'd in glory and in joy
 Behind his plough upon the mountain-side—

The second defect of Wordsworth is his want of humour. The 'Prologue' to *Peter Bell* seems intended to be humorous, but so far it is failure, however instinct it may be otherwise with Wordsworth's happiest characteristics. Not that this is a very serious defect. There is no humour in Milton, and very little in Tennyson. The reason why we regret its absence is that, had Wordsworth possessed this saving quality, he would have been kept from composing much that might have been, with great advantage to his readers, either omitted or wholly modified. Had he possessed a sense of humour, he would have written a much shorter and a far more pathetic tale of Betty Foy's troubles, a story that would have given no opening for Byron's cheap sarcasm :

want of
humour -
not a
serious defect -

Till all who view the Idiot in his glory
Conceive the bard the hero of the story.

And no doubt this entire lack of humour contributed largely to that prolixity, stiffness, and heaviness of touch which are the chief faults of Wordsworth's less inspired passages.

Inconsistency in style-

The third defect of Wordsworth is an inconstancy of style. In his poetry there are 'sudden and unprepared transitions from lines or sentences of peculiar felicity (at all events striking and original) to a style, not only uninspired but undistinguished'. As Coleridge puts it: "There is something unpleasant in the being thus obliged to alternate states of feeling so dissimilar, and this too in a species of writing, the pleasure from which is in part derived from the preparation and previous expectation of the reader." There are many instances of this disharmony of style in poems like *The Blind Highland Boy*, *The Emigrant Mother*, *To a Skylark*, and *Resolution and Independence*. *(Lack of verbal polish)*

The fourth defect of Wordsworth's poetry is a general lack of verbal polish. "One of the most important differences between Wordsworth and the other major poets of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries is that whereas they wrote for the silent reader, i.e. for the eye, he wrote most of his poems to be declaimed, i.e. for the ear. It was only in revising his poems later that he took into account the claims of the eye. This characteristic is the real explanation of the heaviness of style, the occasional clumsiness and general lack of verbal polish, that Tennyson hit off in the epithet *thick-ankled* ('Wordsworth seemed to him *thick-ankled*'). Tennyson saw his own poems as well as hearing them. The critical standards that he applied to Wordsworth's verse—he objected, for example, to the want of literary instinct shown in the repetition of the word 'again' four times in the first fourteen lines of 'Tintern Abbey'—were those of a poet for whom a poem exists primarily on a piece of paper. It is something he can return to whenever he likes, touching up a rhythm here and a metaphor there, as the mood takes him. For Wordsworth, except in the process of revising his poems for a new edition (when the basis was generally either pasted-up sheets of an earlier edition or transcripts made by his women-folk), the poem existed primarily *in his head*—as a rhetorical whole, that is, of which the part could only be reached after all that had preceded it had been declaimed."* *uses thoughts and images too great for the subject-*

Lastly, Wordsworth sometimes uses thoughts and images too great for the subject. "This is," says Coleridge, "an approximation to what might be called *mental bombast*, as distinguished from verbal: for, as in the latter there is a disproportion of the expressions to the thoughts, so in this there is a disproportion of thought to the

* F.W. Bateson, *Wordsworth—A Re-Interpretation* (Longmans, Green & Co/London, 1954), p. 187.

circumstance and occasion." The description of a child, 'a six years' darling of a pigmy size', in the *Immortality Ode* provides an instance of this defect :

Thou best philosopher, who yet dost keep
Thy heritage ! Thou eye among the blind.
That, deaf and silent, read'st the eternal deep,
Haunted for ever by the Eternal Mind,—
Mighty Prophet ! Seer blest !
On whom those truths do rest,
Which we are toiling all our lives to find !
Thou, over whom thy immortality
Broods like the day, a master o'er a slave,
A presence that is not to be put by !

His Style

How great was the need for Wordsworth's lifelong crusade against artificial poetic diction is perhaps best illustrated by the fact that even he himself did not wholly free himself from the stilted phrases of the so-called classical school. Even he could write of the 'deadly tube' (*Recluse*, i 277), the 'thundering tube' (*Descriptive Sketches*, 61), where in either case he himself means a gun ; or when speaking of an eclipse of the sun, could call it—

the hour
When Sol was destined to endure
That darkening of his radiant face,

or again, could use the conventional word 'numbers' for 'song' or 'melody' (*The Solitary Reaper*, 18).

Wordsworth was indebted to Burns in many ways ; and a simple style, relying for effect solely on the weight and force of that which with entire fidelity it utters, Burns could show him.

The poor inhabitant below
Was quick to learn and wise to know,
And keenly felt the friendly glow
And softer flame ;
But thoughtless follies laid him low
And stain'd his name.

Every reader will be conscious of a likeness here to Wordsworth. Still Wordsworth's use of a Burns-like simple style has something unique and unmatched. "Nature herself seems, I say, to take the pen out of his hand, and to write for him with her own bare, sheer, penetrating power. This arises from the profound sincerity with which Wordsworth feels his subject, and also from the profoundly sincere and natural character of his subject itself. He can and will treat such a subject with nothing but the most plain, first-hand, almost austere naturalness. His expression may often be called bald, as, for instance, in the poem of *Resolution and Independence* : but it

is bald as the bare mountain tops are bald, with a baldness which is full of grandeur."* *Happiest lines come direct from out of direct study of nature*

Indeed, we feel in reading him that his happiest lines come from direct out-of-door study of Nature ; he is as accurate an observer as Tennyson, though his expression is simpler. Here are a few examples :

The budding twigs spread out their fan
To catch the breezy air.

(*Early Spring*)

That uncertain heaven received
Into the bosom of the steady lake

(*There was a boy*)

Ships, towers, domes, theatres, and temples lie
Open unto the fields, and to the sky ;
All bright and glittering in the smokeless air.

(*Composed upon Westminster Bridge*)

Over his own sweet voice the stock-dove broods.

(*Resolution and Independence*)

The brooks which down their channels fret

(*Immortality Ode*)

His Imagery (*Power of Imagery in Wordsworth's Imagery*)

We may notice the power and truth of Wordsworth's imagery. Seldom does he employ mere conventional classical comparisons. In one place, indeed, we find him reproducing Milton's archaic astronomy, where blinded Samson complains that for him the sun is dark—

And silent as the moon,
When she deserts the night,
Hid in her vacant interlunar cave :

in his lines to the Moon—

And when thy beauty in the shadowy cave
Is hidden, buried in its monthly grave ;

and in the somewhat artificial poem addressed to his wife (*She was a Phantom of delight*) the metaphor 'pulse of the machine' is both mixed and unhappy, suggesting an odd combination of an anatomist and an automaton-maker. But, broadly speaking, Wordsworth's imagery comes direct from his intense communion with that living world of leaf and stream and sky in which he lived and moved and had his being.

Sometimes Wordsworth's imagination prompts him to felicitous descriptive metaphors, as in the snake-like convolutions of the yew tree's trunk (*Yew Trees*, 16-18), the green moss-grown stones that lie scattered under the shady trees 'like a flock of sheep' (*Nutting*, 35-37) ;

* Matthew Arnold, *Essays in Criticism—Second Series* (Macmillan & Co Ltd/London, 1915), pp. 158-59.

the flocks 'gilded' by the sunset, or the 'hazy ridges' rising in aerial perspective like a ladder whereon angels may ascend to heaven (*An Evening of Extraordinary Splendour*, 32 & 43-52); the weight of dead custom which binds us down like 'frost' (*Immortality Ode*, 128-29), or the two succeeding lines of that Ode where the faculties that still retain traces of their pre-natal spiritual power are compared to the smouldering embers on the hearth which may at any moment be fanned into a flame.

Clouds often furnish Wordsworth with his happiest comparisons. The poet himself wanders 'lonely as a cloud' (*The Daffodils*, 1); the Knight rides 'with the slow motion of a summer cloud' (*Hart-leap Well*, 2); kingdoms are to 'shift about like clouds' (*Rob Roy's Grave*, 91); and the decrepit Leech-gatherer stands motionless, or else drags his body, his limbs, and his staff painfully one after the other, like a cloud,

That heareth not the loud winds when they call;
And moveth all together, if it move at all.

(*Resolution and Independence*, 75-76)

Sometimes Wordsworth merely plays with his fancy, as when he likens a daisy to a nun, an innocent maid at court, a queen, a starveling, a war-like cyclops, a fairy's shield, or a star (*To The Daisy*).

Sometimes, with more inspired vision, he sees in the long line of dancing daffodils the twinkling stars of the Milky Way; and their gay movement is as the laughter of the rippling waves (*The Daffodils*, 7-14) or he hears the cataracts 'blow their trumpets' from the mountain ridges as they fall (*Immortality Ode*, 25). Or, again, for him in his intense realization of the all-pervading life of Nature, a solitary mountain-peak towers, a grim and awful phantom, threatening doom (*Influence of Natural Objects*, 21-29).

Sometimes, too, Wordsworth makes a deliberate and well-weighed comparison; as when the old Leech-gatherer, bowed-down and motionless, is pictured by the complementary images of a boulder, perched on some bare hill-top, and a sea-beast crawled forth and basking on the shore (*Resolution and Independence*, 56-62); or where man's ever-shifting apprehension of moral truth is likened to a water-lily floating on the surface of the waves, though rooted below in the 'stable earth' (*The Excursion* V, 567-69).

His Greatness and Popularity *Wordsworth's poetry is simple and may be told simply*

Wordsworth has many claims to greatness. The cause of the greatness of Wordsworth's poetry is simple, and may be told quite simply. "Wordsworth's poetry is great because of the extraordinary power with which Wordsworth feels the joy offered to us in nature, the joy offered to us in the simple primary affections and duties; and

WORDSWORTH : A GENERAL ESTIMATE

81

because of the extraordinary power with which, in case after case, he shows us this joy, and renders it so as to make us share it."*

Of the sterling merit of Wordsworth's poetry, both in substance and in style, no better proof perhaps can be given than the fact that he is, next to Shakespeare, the great source of popular quotations that have become proverbial, though few perhaps are aware of their authorship. How many have quoted the couplet

(He is only next to Shakespeare)

Alas the gratitude of men
Hath oftener left me mourning

without being aware that they are the closing lines of *Simon Lee*; and how familiar to us all is the vivid picture summoned up by the lines

The swan on still St Mary's Lake
Float double, swan and shadow

and yet probably not one person in a hundred could put his finger on the quotation, which occurs in the sixth stanza of *Yarrow Unvisited*.

Indeed, Wordsworth is the source of many popular quotations. Particular mention may be made of the following :

And 'tis my faith that every flower
Enjoys the air it breathes.

(*Early Spring*)

O cuckoo ! shall I call thee bird,
Or but a wandering voice?

(*To the Cuckoo*)

The river glideth at his own sweet will.

(*Westminster Bridge*)

Thy soul was like a star, and dwelt apart.

(*London 1802*)

The good old rule

...the simple plan.

That they should take who have the power
And they should keep who can

(*Rob Roy's Grave*)

They flash upon that inward eye
Which is the bliss of solitude

(*The Daffodils*)

The Child is father of the Man

(*The Rainbow*)

A creature not too bright or good
For human nature's daily food.

(*She was a Phantom of Delight*)

* Matthew Arnold, *Essays in Criticism—Second Series* (Macmillan & Co Ltd/London, 1915), p. 153.

The light that never was, on sea or land
(*Peele Castle*)

To me the meanest flower that blows can give
Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears.
(*Immortality Ode*)

His Contribution

By his theory as well as his practice Wordsworth effected a revolution in English poetry. But the revolution he led was not primarily a back-to-Nature movement. It was rather a movement which called for a fresh and mutually fructifying reunion of reality and idealism. Wordsworth's unique virtue as a poet comes from his preoccupation with the indestructibles in Nature and in human mind. His method is to combine the instruments and insights of the poet with the ideals of the philosopher whose bias is strongly humanistic. His continuing belief in the dignity of the common man brings his work into spiritual alignment with the democratic revolutions of his age. Near the end of his days he declared, "As far as the people are capable of governing themselves, I am a democrat."

"He demolished the eighteenth century convention of poetic diction; but this service, great as it was, was only incidental to his main purpose, which was to proclaim the true nature, end, and best themes of poetry, and the true function of the poet in society. By his exaltation of the poet's office, and the noble consistency with which he himself exercised it, he established in England a tradition of serious poetry which remained unchallenged until twenty years ago."*

Conclusion

Greatest poet of the 19th Century -

Wordsworth is the greatest poet of the nineteenth century. He has left sufficient of pure poetry, heart-searching and beautiful, enough for a Wordsworthian anthology that will remain among the most enduring treasures of romanticism. Indeed, Wordsworth is the most massive mountain in that lofty range which we call the Romantic Revival. The loftiness of his poetic thought and the fire of his poetic zeal transcend anything in his contemporaries.

Wordsworth is the massive mountain in the lofty range which we call the Romantic Revival.

* Herbert Grierson & J. C. Smith, *A Critical History of English Poetry* (Penguin Books Ltd/ Harmondsworth, England, 1966), p. 313.

Critics on Wordsworth

In the play of *Fancy*, Wordsworth, to my feelings, is not always graceful, and sometimes *recondite*. The *likeness* is occasionally too strange, or demands too peculiar a point of view, or is such as appears the creature of predetermined research, rather than spontaneous presentation. Indéed his fancy seldom displays itself as mere and unmodified fancy. But in imaginative power, he stands nearest of all modern writers to Shakespeare and Milton ; and yet in a kind perfectly unborrowed and his own. To employ his own words, which are at once an instance and an illustration, he does indeed to all thoughts and to all objects

———add the gleam,
The light that never was, on sea or land,
The consecration, and the poet's dream.

—S. T. Coleridge

* * *

* * *

* * *

He gathers manna in the wilderness ; he strikes the barren rock for the gushing moisture. He elevates the me by the strength of his own aspirations ; he closes the naked with beauty and grandeur from the stories of his own recollections. No cypress grove loads his verse with funeral pomp : but imagination lends 'a sense of joy

To the bare trees and mountains bare,
And grass in the green field.'

No storm, no shipwreck startles us by its horrors : but the rainbow lifts its head in the cloud, and the breeze sighs through the withered fern. No sad vicissitude of fate, no overwhelming catastrophe in nature deforms his page ; but the dew-drop glitters on the bending flower, the tear collects in the glistening eye.

Beneath the hills, along the flowery vales,
The generations are prepared ; the pangs,
The internal pangs are ready ; the dread strife
Of poor humanity's afflicted will,
Struggling in vain with ruthless destiny.

As the lark ascends from its low bed on fluttering wing, and salutes the morning skies. so Mr. Wordsworth's unpretending Muse in russet guise scales the summits of reflection, while it makes the round earth its foolstool and its home !

William Hazlitt

* * *

* * *

* * *

But the great distinction of Wordsworth, and the pledge of his increasing popularity, is the extent of his sympathy with what is *really* permanent in human feelings, and also the depth of this sympathy. Young and Cowper, the two earlier leaders in the province of meditative poetry, are too circumscribed in the range of their sympathies, too narrow, too illiberal and too exclusive. Both these poets manifested the quality of their strength in the quality of their public reception. Popular in some degree from the first, they entered upon the inheritance of their fame almost at once. Far different was the fate of Wordsworth : for in poetry of this class, which appeals to what lies deepest in man, in proportion to the native power of the poet, and his fitness for permanent life, is the strength of resistance in the public taste. Whatever is too original will be hated at first. It must slowly mould a public for itself ; and the resistance of the early thoughtless judgments must be overcome by a counter-resistance to itself in a better audience slowly mustering against the first. Forty and seven years it is since William Wordsworth first appeared as an author. Twenty of those years he was the scoff of the world, and his poetry a byword of scorn. Since then and more than once, senates have rung with acclamations to the echo of his name. Now, at this moment, whilst we are talking about him, he has entered upon his seventy-sixth year. For himself, according to the course of nature, he cannot be far from his setting ; but his poetry is only now clearing the clouds that gathered about its rising. Meditative poetry is perhaps that province of literature which will ultimately maintain most power amongst the generations which are coming ; but in this department, at least, there is little competition to be apprehended by Wordsworth from anything that has appeared since the death of Shakespeare.

Thomas De Quincey

* * *

* * *

* * *

He took a personal interest in the corners of the universe. There is a print of Rembrandt said to represent a piece of the Compagna, a mere waste, with a stump and a man, and under is written '*Tacet et loquitur*, and thousands will pass the old print-shop where it hangs, and yet have a taste for paintings, and colours, and oils : but some fanciful students, some lonely stragglers, some long-haired enthusiasts, by chance will come, one by one, and look, and look, and be hardly able to take their eyes from the fascination, so

massive is the shade, so still the conception, so firm the execution. Thus it is with Wordsworth and his poetry. *Tacet et loquitur*. Fashion apart, the million won't read it. Why should they?—they could not understand it, don't put them out, let them buy, and sell and die,—but idle students, and enthusiastic wanderers and solitary thinkers, will read, and read, and read, while their lives and their occupations hold. In truth, his works are the Scriptures of the intellectual life; for that same searching, and finding, and penetrating power which the real Scripture exercises on those engaged, as are the mass of men, in practical occupations and domestic ties, do his works exercise on the meditative, the solitary, and the young.

Walter Bagehot

To give aright what he wishes to give, to interpret and render successfully, is not always within Wordsworth's own command. It is within no poet's command; here is the part of the Muse, the inspiration, the God, the 'not ourselves.' In Wordsworth's case, the accident, for so it may almost be called, of inspiration, is of peculiar importance. No poet, perhaps, is so evidently filled with a new and sacred energy when the inspiration is upon him; no poet, when it fails him, is so left 'weak as is a breaking wave.' I remember hearing him say that 'Goethe's poetry was not inevitable enough.' The remark is striking and true; no line in Goethe, as Goethe said himself, but its maker knew well how it came there. Wordsworth is right, Goethe's poetry is not inevitable; not inevitable enough. But Wordsworth's poetry, when he is at his best, is inevitable, as inevitable as Nature herself. It might seem that Nature not only gave him the matter for his poem, but wrote his poem for him.

Matthew Arnold

The music of mere metre performs but a limited, yet a very peculiar and subtly ascertained function, in Wordsworth's poetry. With him, metre is but an additional grace, accessory to that deeper music of words and sounds, that moving power, which they exercise in the nobler prose no less than in formal poetry. It is a sedative to that excitement, an excitement sometimes almost painful, under which the language, alike of poetry and prose, attains a rhythmical power, independent of metrical combination, and dependent rather on some subtle adjustment of the elementary sound of words themselves to the image or feeling they convey. Yet some of his pieces, pieces prompted by a sort of half-playful mysticism, like the *Daffodils* and *The Two April Mornings*, are distinguished by a certain quaint gaiety of metre, and rival by their perfect execution, in this respect, similar pieces among our own Elizabethan, or contemporary French poetry. And those who take up these poems after

an interval of months, or years perhaps, may be surprised at finding how well old favourites wear, how their strange, inventive turns of diction or thought still send through them the old feeling of surprise. Those who lived about Wordsworth were all great lovers of the older English literature, and oftentimes there came out in him a noticeable likeness to our earlier poets. He quotes unconsciously, but with new power of meaning, a clause from one of Shakespeare's sonnets ; and, as with some other men's most famous work, the *Ode on the Recollections of Childhood* had its anticipator. He drew something too from the unconscious mysticism of the old English language itself, drawing out the inward significance of its racy idiom, and the not wholly unconscious poetry of the language used by the simplest people under strong excitement—language, therefore, at its origin.

Walter Pater

What made Wordsworth's poems a medicine for my state of mind, was that they expressed, not mere outward beauty, but states of feeling, and of thought coloured by feeling, under the excitement of beauty. They seemed to be the very culture of the feelings, which I was in quest of. In them I seemed to draw from a source of inward joy, of sympathetic and imaginative pleasure, which could be shared in by all human beings ; which had no connection with struggle or imperfection, but would be made richer by every improvement in the physical or social condition of mankind. From them I seemed to learn what would be the perennial sources of happiness, when all the greater evils of life shall have been removed. And I felt myself at once better and happier as I came under their influence. There have certainly been, even in our own age, greater poets than Wordsworth ; but poetry of deeper and loftier feeling could not have done for me at that time what his did. I needed to be made to feel that there was real, permanent happiness in tranquil contemplation. Wordsworth taught me this not only without turning away from, but with a greatly increased interest in the common feelings and common destiny of human beings. And the delight which these poems gave me, proved that with culture of this sort, there was nothing to dread from the most confirmed habit of analysis. At the conclusion of the *Poems* came the famous Ode, falsely called Platonic, *Intimations of Immortality* in which, along with more than his usual sweetness of melody and rhythm, and along with the two passages of grand imagery but bad philosophy so often quoted, I found that he too had had similar experience to mine ; that he also had felt that the first freshness of youthful enjoyment of life was not lasting ; but that he had sought for compensation, and found it, in the way in which he was now teaching me to find it. The result was

that I gradually, but completely, emerged from my habitual depression, and was never again subject to it. I long continued to value Wordsworth less according to his intrinsic merits, than by the measure of what he had done for me. Compared with the greatest poets, he may be said to be the poet of unpoetical natures, possessed of quiet and contemplative tastes. But unpoetical natures are precisely those which require poetic cultivation. This poetic cultivation Wordsworth is much more fitted to give, than poets who are intrinsically far more poets than he.

John Stuart Mill

There have been greater poets than Wordsworth, but none more original. He saw new things, or he saw things in a new way. Naturally, this would have availed us little if his new things had been private fancies, or if his new perception had been superficial. But that was not so. If it had been, Wordsworth might have won acceptance more quickly, but he would not have gained his lasting hold on poetic minds. As it is, those in whom he creates the taste by which he is relished, those who learn to love him (and in each generation they are not a few), never let him go. Their love for him is of the kind that he himself celebrated, a settled passion, perhaps "slow to begin," but "never ending," and twined around the roots of their being. And the reason is that they find his way of seeing the world, his poetic experience, what Arnold meant by his "criticism of life," to be something deep and therefore something that will hold. It continues to bring them joy, peace, strength, exaltation. It does not thin out or break beneath them as they grow older and wiser: nor does it fail them, much less repel them, in sadness or even in their sorest need. And yet—to return to our starting-point—it continues to strike them as original, and something more. It is not like Shakespeare's myriad mindedness; it is, for good or evil or both, peculiar. They can remember, perhaps, the day when first they saw a cloud somewhat as Wordsworth saw it, or first really understood what made him write this poem or that; his unique way of seeing and feeling, though now familiar and beloved, still brings them not only peace, strength, exaltation, but a "shock of mild surprise": and his paradoxes, long known by heart and found full of truth, still remain paradoxes.

A.C. Bradley

Wordsworth's poetry is essentially mystical. But whereas the mysticism of other men consists mainly in their effort to escape from the senses, the mysticism of Wordsworth is grounded and rooted, actually, *in* the senses. The natural world speaks not to the intellect, but to that in us which is most 'natural', viz. our senses. It is

only when we allow reason, or intellect, to confuse the clear and sweet report of the senses that we cease to see visions, and from being poets become mere men again. It is our eyes and our ears that matter to us ; it is by them that we become wise and immortal—as soon as we begin to think, we join the foolish or the dead. If Wordsworth does not go so far as to tell us that ‘the soul is but the senses catching fire’, he at least comes near to hinting it. I say ‘Wordsworth’, and I mean by that the Wordsworth who now discovers himself to us in *Lyrical Ballads* ; not the Godwinian Wordsworth, truly ; nor yet the Wordsworth who in later life spoke of ‘I and my brother the Dean’ ; but the Wordsworth who matters, the Wordsworth who begins in 1798 and dies about 1807. This pure sensationalism of Wordsworth—I use ‘sensationalism’, of course, in its philosophic sense, of a theory of mind which regards the senses as the sources of truth—this pure sensationalism of Wordsworth is apt to take us by surprise. It surprises us because we are not much in the habit of believing that poets mean what they say. And certainly, in its implications, it appears, at least to our first reflections, a degree naive. Yet in this sensationalism Wordsworth began, and it is when he passes from it (about 1807) that he ends.

H.W. Garrod

* * *

* * *

* * *

It is only very occasionally that he admits the existence in the world around him of those ‘unknown modes of being’ of which our immediate intuitions of things make us so disquietingly aware. Normally what he does is to pump the dangerous Unknown out of Nature and refill the emptied forms of hills and woods, flowers and waters, with something more reassuringly familiar—with humanity, with Anglicanism. He will not admit that a yellow primrose is simply a yellow primrose—beautiful, but essentially strange, having its own alien life apart. He wants it to possess some sort of soul, to exist humanly, not simply flowerily. He wants the earth to be more than earthy, to be a divine person. But the life of vegetation is radically unlike the life of man : the earth has a mode of being that is certainly not the mode of being a person. ‘Let Nature be your teacher’, says Wordsworth. The advice is excellent. But how strangely he himself puts it into practice ! Instead of listening humbly to what the teacher says, he shuts his ears and himself dictates the lesson he desires to hear. The pupil knows better than his master ; the worshipper substitutes his own oracles for those of the god. Instead of accepting the lesson as it is given to his immediate intuitions, he distorts it rationalistically into the likeness of a parson’s sermon or a professional lecture. Our direct intuitions of Nature tell us that the world is bottomlessly strange : alien, even when it is kind and beautiful ; having innumerable modes of being that are not our modes : always mysteriously not personal, not conscious, not moral ; often hostile and sinister ; sometimes even unimaginably, because inhumanly, evil. In

his youth, it would seem, Wordsworth left his direct intuitions of the world unwarped.

The sounding cataract
Haunted me like a passion : the tall rock,
The mountain, and the deep and gloomy wood,
Their colours and their forms, were then to me
An appetite ; a feeling and a love.
That had no need of a remoter charm,
By thought supplied, nor any interest Unborrowed from
the eye.

As the years passed, however, he began to interpret them in terms of a preconceived philosophy. Procrustes-like, he tortured his feelings and perceptions until they fitted his system....

The change in Wordsworth's attitude towards Nature is symptomatic of his general apostasy. Beginning as what I may call a natural aesthete, he transformed himself, in the course of years, into a moralist, a thinker. He used his intellect to distort his exquisitely acute and subtle intuitions of the world, to explain away their often disquieting strangeness, to simplify them into a comfortable metaphysical unreality. Nature had endowed him with the poet's gift of seeing more than ordinarily far into the brick walls of external reality, of intuitively comprehending the character of the bricks, of feeling the quality of their being, and establishing the appropriate relationship with them. But he preferred to think his gifts away. He preferred, in the interests of a preconceived religious theory, to ignore the disquieting strangeness of things, to interpret the impersonal diversity of Nature in terms of a divine, anglican unity. He chose, in a word, to be a philosopher, comfortably at home with a man-made and, therefore, thoroughly comprehensible system, rather than a poet adventuring for adventure's sake through the mysterious world revealed by his direct and undistorted intuitions.

Aldous Huxley

* * *

* * *

* * *

He reaches, at times, so high a degree of excellence that the mere verbal felicity of some of his simplest lines baffles the imitation of the most refined artists :

Perhaps the plaintive numbers flow
For old, unhappy, far-off things,
And battles long ago...

But he frequently mixes the highest poetry with the flatness of unimpassioned, uninspired prose. He also shows himself, in many a period or stanza, devoid of ease, elegance and pliancy. He is more than once awkwardly naive, clumsily familiar, or, on the contrary, more solemn and pompous than needs be. The talent for construction, niggardly bestowed on the romantic poets of all countries, is parti-

cularly weak in him. He could never frame and fashion a considerable poem with due equilibrium of substance and form, of thought and story. In this respect, *The Excursion* is a memorable failure. As to *The Prelude*, it owes its permanent interest partly to its admirable passages of poetry, partly to its philosophical or to its autobiographical value, which we feel, as we read, to be merits not strictly poetic. Only in compositions of moderate length, like *The Ruined Cottage*, *Michael*, *Laodamia* did he achieve perfect harmony, and in many of his lyrics and sonnets.

Emile Legouis

Wordsworth separates himself, explicitly, from the eighteenth-century pursuit of the beauties of Nature—pampering the eye with meagre novelties, & c. The picturesque as studied and explained, for example, by William Gilpin had some attraction for Wordsworth (his early poetry shows this); and part of his business was to notice and recollect aspects of scenery hitherto unused in art. But this kind of observation, never without interests for Wordsworth, was a subordinate part of his work. Closeness to reality—‘his eye upon his object’—was consistently his aim; but his study of Nature involved more than the notice of facts; Nature was more than the object of senses. Full of ‘danger or desire’, Nature could only be rendered poetically by an enthusiastic imagination. ‘The picturesque’ might be taken coolly and estimated technically in the terms used by Henry Tylney and his sister in *Northanger Abbey* discussing the landscape around Bath—‘fore-grounds, distances and second distances—side-screens and perspectives’, and so on—but Wordsworth’s point of view is generally different. His didactic exposition of Nature no doubt often seemed to be much the same thing as had been customary for a generation or two before him with students of the picturesque, but his imagination and his theory of imagination were original and his own. Even in the more didactic of his writings, and even apart from his poetical work altogether, as in the tract on the Convention of Cintra, he declares himself for passionate imagination as a nobler guide than dispassionate understanding. ‘A creature of ‘a’ ‘fiery heart’,’ his poetry seemed to him to derive its virtue from something more than observation; the prophetic vision was idle, was nothing at all, without the prophetic ecstasy.

W.P. Ker

There is a remarkable letter of Wordsworth’s in 1801 which he wrote to Charles James Fox in sending him a copy of the *Ballads*. You will find a long extract from this letter in Professor Harper’s book. I quote one sentence. In commending his poems to the fashionable politician’s attention Wordsworth says:

Recently by spreading of manufactures through every part of the country, by the heavy taxes upon postage, by workhouses, houses of industry, and the invention of soup shops, etc., super-added to the increasing disproportion between the price of labour and that of the necessities of life, the bonds of domestic feeling among the poor, as far as the influence of these things has extended, have been weakened, and in innumerable instances entirely destroyed'.

Wordsworth then proceeds to expound a doctrine which nowadays is called distributism. And Wordsworth was not merely taking advantage of an opportunity to lecture a rather disreputable statesman and rouse him to useful activity; he was seriously explaining the content and purpose of his poems: without this preamble Mr. Fox could hardly be expected to make head or tail of the Idiot Boy or the sailor's parrot. You may say that this public spirit is irrelevant to Wordsworth's greatest poems; nevertheless I believe that you will understand a great poem like 'Resolution and Independence' better if you understand the purposes and social passions which animated its author; and unless you understand these you will misread Wordsworth's literary criticism entirely. Incidentally, those who speak of Wordsworth as the original Lost Leader (a reference which Browning, as I remember, denied) should make pause and consider that when a man takes politics and social affairs seriously the difference between revolution and reaction may be by the breadth of a hair, and that Wordsworth may possibly have been no renegade but a man who thought, so far as he thought at all, for himself. But it is Wordsworth's social interest that inspires his own novelty of form in verse, and backs up his explicit remarks upon poetic diction; and it is really this social interest which (consciously or not) the fuss was all about. It was not so much from lack of thought as from warmth of feeling that Wordsworth originally wrote the words 'the language of conversation in middle and lower class society'. It was not from any recantation of political principles, but from having had it brought to his attention that, as a general literary principle, this would never do, that he altered them. Where he wrote 'my purpose was to imitate, and as far as possible, to adopt, the very language of men' he was saying what no serious critic could disapprove.

T.S. Eliot

* * *

* * *

* * *

It is significant that Wordsworth to some extent abandoned Nature herself, as if he had discovered its inadequacy; abandoned it first for 'Duty', and then for Faith. Wordsworth wrote much excellent poetry to the end of his life, but his best powers were spent in expressing the rapture of his reunion with Nature after exile, and of the 'high moments' which followed—moments which in the nature of things were bound to recur less frequently once he had regained his equilibrium, and which in any case are probably the special privilege

of youth. Much of his later poetry deals with experiences and subjects other than the moments of vision which are admittedly his special prerogative, and is consequently felt to be of less importance. But, as Miss Batho has shown, it is incorrect to attribute 'arrested development' or 'decay' to Wordsworth. There is, indeed, a certain pathos in the circumstances that his most splendidly sustained utterance should have been a farewell to his own visionary power. But the power had lasted as long as the best period of most poets, who in general are not blamed (as Wordsworth has been) for doing their finest work before the age of forty. The *Ode* occurred at a unique climacteric moment in Wordsworth's history, and in his later work the 'worlds not quickened by the sun' approximate more and more to the orthodox heaven. But though he may always be valued as the poet of the first and not the later phase, this change is the natural development of a mystic who wishes to 'improve those transient Gleams of Joy...into an inviolable and perpetual State of Bliss and Happiness'. Men cannot live by gleams alone, and though Wordsworth may have been a worse poet as he grew older, it has been argued (by a Dean, it is true) that he was a better 'man'. This cannot be expected to impress those whose only concern is with his poetry.

Basil Willey

* * *

* * *

* * *

Perhaps his most noticeable characteristic is his extreme egotism. Keats called his poetry 'the egotistical sublime' and Hazlitt was very near the mark when he observed: 'We do not think our author has any very cordial sympathy with Shakespeare. How should he? Shakespeare was the least of an egotist of anybody in the world.' Wordsworth, by presumption, was the most of an egotist of anybody in the world. We might, indeed, pursue Hazlitt's contrast further, for Shakespeare and Wordsworth stand at the opposite poles of English poetry. I do not place the *quality* of Wordsworth's poetry much lower than Shakespeare's. That may seem a bold claim, but where, for variety and vitality of pure poetic expression, can you match the wealth of Shakespeare except in Wordsworth? Their contrast lies in their universality. For Wordsworth is only universal in the subjective apprehension of the phenomena of the universe, whereas Shakespeare has an objective comprehension of human destiny. Wordsworth has no dramatic sense because he is his own hero and his destiny is the destiny of the world he contemplates and feels at one with. But over Shakespeare's world broods that spirit of fatality, that sense of opposition between man's desires and his destiny, which is the condition of all tragedy and the force of all dramatic values.

Herbert Read

* * *

* * *

* * *

It is hard to find a last word to say on the achievement of Wordsworth as a poet.

He said himself of his cherished theme,

the might of souls

And what they do within themselves,

that in the main 'It lies far hidden from the reach of words'. If that is so for the poet, how can a humble critic hope to do justice to him in the unwinged words of prose? I fall back on the naive but penetrating question with which the engaging Audrey rounded upon Touchstone: 'I do not know what poetical is. Is it honest in deed and word? Is it a true thing?'

For Wordsworth we may answer: Yes, it is a true thing. What he has to express, the inner heart of man, the deepest secrets of the human mind, the mysterious responses of heart and mind to Nature, is perhaps the most difficult thing that any poet has tried to express. But Wordsworth set about it with the conviction that poetry can be a true thing. His method, as he said, was to keep his eye upon his object, to 'look steadily at his subject': he watched intently the surfaces of things so as to read their inner meaning, listened to the words of simple people, beggars, children, rustics, even idiots, to draw from them hints and signs of the ultimate truths that he was after. He developed the power to register the most evanescent movements, the most delicate outward manifestations of the inner life.

Helen Darbishire

What we miss in Milton with all his greatness is sympathy with poor human nature—its blended greatness and weakness. His attitude to us is harsh and dictatorial; and it is here that Wordsworth supplies what we seek in vain in Milton. Wordsworth's sympathy with human nature was intense if somewhat narrow in range. It may be true that "large tracts of human feeling and experience were unvisited by him and lay beyond his horizon." But his narrowness is not that of arrogance or conscious superiority. He loves fellow-men with such intensity—is so full of his message of joy and peace—that he is indifferent to aspects of their life irrelevant to his great purpose. He has not Shakespeare's or Burns's interest in the manners of men, he is so deeply interested in their souls; and like Milton he lacks humour. But his heart goes out to humanity like that of the great prophets. If he loves Nature it is as an inspirer of life and joy; his Nature is in profoundest sympathy with the nature of the human spirit.

H. J. C. Grierson

Wordsworth achieves greatness because his private struggles towards psychic integration have a representative quality. The poems generalise themselves, as they are read into the reactions of

the human individual fighting for its spiritual survival in a society that seems to have no place for it. And this makes him, with Blake, the first specifically modern English poet. The difference between Wordsworth and Blake and poets like Chaucer, Spenser, Milton, Dryden or Pope is, it is not too much to say, almost a difference of kind. Although the exact emphasis naturally varies, the earlier poets all shared with their audience (i) a belief in the validity of the literary tradition they inherited, and (ii) an ultimate sense of obligation to the social order (religious-ethical as well as political-economic) in which they had grown up. Wordsworth and Blake did not accept either of these presuppositions. But Wordsworth's example was more important than Blake's for his contemporaries, and perhaps for us too, because Wordsworth, or a part of him, would have *liked* to believe in a literary tradition and an inherited social order. To survive all that was most genuine in him, his *daimon*, the conscience of his conscience, had to fight against the ever-present temptation to conformity and to learn to make its denials and refusals more and more uncompromising. It is, I think, this extremism in Wordsworth, the drastic and even shocking elements in both the man and the poet, that gives his struggle towards integration its heroic quality. Poems like "The Idiot Boy", "We are Seven" and *Peter Bell* are not merely outside the literary tradition—Blake's poems are outside it too—they are written in a deliberate defiance of it. The gross, offensive non-literariness is an important part of their meaning. The revolutionary manner complements the revolutionary matter—which might be described as a series of demonstrations of the superior humanity of men and women who are either outside or at best only on the edge of ordinary organized society.

F. W. Bateson

The revolution Wordsworth led was not primarily a back-to-nature movement. It was rather a movement which called for a fresh and mutually fructifying reunion of reality and ideality. His special individual *virtue* as a poet comes from his preoccupation with the indestructibles in nature and in mind. His method is to combine the instruments and insights of the poet with the ideals of the philosopher whose bias is strongly humanistic. His continuing belief in the dignity and dependability of the common man brings his work into spiritual alignment with those democratic revolutions which in his time, both in Europe and America, were coming to the fore after the long years of the *ancien regime*.

Carlos Baker

It is worth reminding ourselves that Wordsworth was seemingly altogether unaffected by the evolutionist views or leanings of his contemporaries—Erasmus Darwin and Goethe. The education of the

spirit by nature was for him, as it was for Hartley, an affair confined to the life of the individual human being. It did not occur to him that the human race itself might be the product of a natural process of evolution. With later poets this idea played a larger part in their conception of how man is related to nature, and it enabled some of them, like Swinburne and Meredith, to maintain a naturalism which Wordsworth virtually abandoned...But the impulse given to philosophic nature-poetry by the theory of evolution was not lasting; it was not strong enough to withstand the withering effect of scientific realism. Nor did any of the evolutionary poets command a note as sweet, homely and inspiring as Wordsworth's. Wordsworth is, of all English poets, the one who gave the most impressive and the most emotionally satisfying account of man's relation to universal nature. This is partly due to his peculiar imaginative endowments; and partly to the fact that his poetry held in solution more of the philosophic ideas implied in the "worship of nature" than that of any other English poet, or held them more perfectly in solution.

Joseph Warren Beach

Wordsworth's life-work reads as a continuous effort to re-express the nakedly spectral appearances of *The Prelude* and the sheer Machiavellian evil of *The Borderers* into (i) a bright and glittering nature, and (ii) shapes of ecclesiastical and national organization. Often enough he succeeds. His sonnets have sharp definition and detonation and an especially compressed power. But, after *The Borderers*, no full-length poem of satisfying action results. The flights are short and descriptive, and depend on other arts. Moreover, though Wordsworth's utterances on all final problems and unblenching remembrances of sternest destinies are of noble worth they lose by reiteration and isolation. Energies are neglected rather than eternally transmuted, while his eternities tend towards the abstract, or at least are diffused into several independent structure-symbolisms. There is a failure in face of erotic powers. That it why except in short poems, sun-feeling and dewy glitterings, though frequent, remain somewhat ineffectual. Ethically, Wordsworth never breaks new ground. The established values remain intact, whereas poetry's more normal business is to *reclaim* territory from evil possession, to redeem rather than reject, seizing on essential good: of which great prophet is Nietzsche. Though as a whole lacking such creative leverage Wordsworth's work abounds in profound comments on the creative powers and numerous exquisite poems on art itself. Wordsworth's kinship with Milton is fairly obvious and driven home by the central and inclusive nature of his ode on *Sound*, while in mysticism he draws near the inward and meditative doctrines of Indian philosophy. Yet he is also essentially Nordic and very fond of Druidical, or other all but pre-historic, remains. He is rather like Shakespeare's Prospero. As for the fusion of mind with nature to create the living paradise outlined in the *Recluse* fragment, to that

Shelley and Keats bear stronger *immediate* witness than Wordsworth : a limitation balanced, perhaps forced, by his far greater range of social and national realism.

G. Wilson Knight

Whatever we may think of Wordsworth's poetry, we cannot deny his vital role in the history of ideas. As a major figure in the Romantic Movements he contributed a new keen sense of the values of childhood and rural life ; of the importance of memory, of time, growth, and continuity ; of the necessity to explore one's own past and to establish a personal sense of identity ; of the need to probe the mysteries of life and the unconscious depths of the human soul. Dissatisfied with a dualistic metaphysics, he softened its traditional sharp distinctions between appearance and reality, mind and matter, body and soul, nature and supernature. He was convinced that analytical reason is inadequate to portray the integrality and flow of experience ; reacted against industrial mechanization and the 'monstrous anthill' of the metropolis ; recognized the supreme value of freedom, and shared in the widening sympathy for the poorer classes. He appreciated afresh the poetry of common life and the beauty of wild nature, and he realized that a work of art grows as a tree does, with an organic unity all its own. In most of these respects he agreed with other great romantics. Arthur O. Lovejoy has argued that 'the word "romantic" has come to mean so many things that, by itself, it means nothing'. Perhaps. But the leaders of the Romantic Movement exhibited, as Wittgenstein would say, a 'family resemblance'. Wordsworth was a most important member of that family.

It we turn from his role in the Romantic period to his status in our own times, his place is less secure. The present climate of thought hardly works in his favour : British-American philosophy is predominantly analytical. As in the eighteenth century, there is a tendency to reduce the whole to the parts, the grand to the humdrum, the mysterious to the patent. An uneasy coalition of analysts and positivists has restored philosophy to the tradition of Hobbes, Locke, and Hume. Some of us think that this is not the last word in human wisdom. Although we find the older idealism and transcendentalism too fuzzy, and we rightly admire the intellectual rigour of the Anglo-American tradition, we think the interpretation of nature should be based upon the whole range of experience and not upon a desiccated version of it. For those who seek this integral vision Wordsworth answers a need of the human spirit.

Melvin Rader

PART TWO

THE POEM

...that Lay
More than historic, that prophetic Lay
Wherein (high theme by thee first sung a right)
Of the foundations and the building up
Of a Human Spirit thou hast dared to tell
What may be told, to the understanding mind
Revealable.....

—Coleridge

8

Introduction and
School time.

The Prelude—Book I

Feels joy at the
feeling of liberation
from the large city
of London where
he felt as though he had lived
for a long time
as a long time
discipline

olive gift

V. S. L. S. L.
Half aware

O there is blessing in this gentle breeze, gentle breeze
 A visitant that while if fans my cheek blows
 Doth seem half-conscious of the joy it brings
 From the green fields, and from yon azure sky. blue sky—
 Whate'er its mission, the soft breeze can come
 To none more grateful than to me; escaped
 From the vast city, where I long had pined lived unhappily
 A discontented sojourner: now free,
 Free as a bird to settle where I will.

10

what place I
shall live in -
Shelter

What dwelling shall receive me? in what vale
 Shall be my harbour? underneath what grove
 Shall I take up my home? and what clear stream
 Shall with its murmur lull me into rest? what clear stream
 The earth is all before me. With a heart broken joy but heart
 Joyous, nor scared at its own liberty, not afraid of freedom
 I look about; and should the chosen guide
 Be nothing better than a wandering cloud, my guide is wind -
 I cannot miss my way. I breathe again!

I cannot lose
my way.
Rest in my feet's

Trances of thought and mountings of the mind my mind seems to
 Come fast upon me: it is shaken off, is a cut of itself
 That burden of my own unnatural self,
 The heavy weight of many a weary day come out of unnatural
 Not mine, and such as were not made for me. ways -
 Long months of peace (if such bold word accord
 With any promises of human life), if human life can offer
 Long months of ease and undisturbed delight undisturbed
 Are mine in prospect; whither shall I turn, joy -

20

alien to
me -
I see long months
of my.In what direction
shall I turn -

Lines 1-30

This gentle breeze is a divine gift to me. It is a visitor from heaven which, while it blows against my cheek, seems to be half-conscious of the joy it brings to me from the green fields and the blue sky. Whatever its mission, this mild breeze cannot be more refreshing to anybody else than it is to me because I have escaped from the vast city where I lived unhappily as a discontented sojourner for a long time. Now I am free like a bird to settle down wherever I like. What place will become my abode? In what valley shall I seek shelter? Under which grove shall I find my home? Which clear stream will lull me into rest with its murmuring sounds? I can see the whole earth before me. I look around myself with a heart that is joyful but not afraid of its freedom; and even if the guide that I choose to follow be no better than a wandering cloud, I cannot miss my way. Once again I can breathe freely. I find myself lost in thoughts, and my mind seems to rise out of itself. I feel myself relieved of the burden of my unnatural life—the heavy weight that oppressed me for many days. This burden was alien to me. I now foresee long months of peace and undisturbed joy if indeed human life can ever offer such happiness. In what direction shall I turn?

*writes history of his
own growth - He dismisses
the various memories for
the purpose -*

By road or pathway, or through trackless field,
Up hill or down, or shall some floating thing *Or shall any floating object* 30
Upon the river point me out my course? *one like this show me the way.*

Dear Liberty! Yet what would it avail *use*
But for a gift that consecrates the joy?
For I, methought, while the sweet breath of heaven *while breeze*
Was blowing on my body, felt within *on me - one within*
A correspondent breeze, that gently moved
With quickening virtue, but is now become

A tempest, a redundant energy, *Superfluous*
Vexing its own creation. Thanks to both, *inner outer wind*
And their congenial powers, that, while they join

In breaking up a long-continued frost,
Bring with them vernal promises, the hope *bright promises* 40
Of active days urged on by flying hours,—

Days of sweet leisure, taxed with patient thought *burdened with*
Abstruse, nor wanting punctual service high, *philosophical meditations*
Matins and vespers of harmonious verse!

Thus far, O Friend! did I, not used to make *not used to*
A present joy the matter of a song, *according to impressions*

Pour forth that day my soul in measured strains
That would not be forgotten, and are here
Recorded: to the open fields I told *I made prophecy to the open fields* 50
A prophecy: poetic numbers came

Spontaneously to clothe in priestly robe *in religious garb*

A renovated spirit singled out, *for writing poetry*

Such hope was mine, for holy services. *Poetry for spiritual exaltation*

My own voice cheered me, and, for more, the mind's

Internal echo of the imperfect sound; *imperfect outward sound*

To both I listened, drawing from them both *listened to both sounds*

A cheerful confidence in things to come.

Content and not unwilling now to give *inclined to let my intense desire for writing poetry rest for some time*

A respite to this passion, I paced on

With brisk and eager steps; and came, at length,

To a green shady place, where down I sate

Beneath a tree, slackening my thoughts by choice *deliberately relaxing my thoughts* 60

Which road or pathway shall I choose ? Through which trackless field shall I go uphill or downhill ? Or shall some object floating on the river show me the course that I ought to follow ?

Lines 31-45

Liberty is dear to me. Yet what would be the use of liberty without a further gift that can render this joy sacred ? For it appeared to me that while the sweet heavenly breeze was blowing on my body, there was a corresponding inner breeze which moved gently at first and then with increasing speed till it has now grown into a tempest which with its superfluous energy has become troublesome to its own source. I am grateful to the two kinds of breeze and to their congenial powers. They have combined together to break up a long-continued frost. They bring with them a bright promise of spring, making me hope for days of activity in which the time will seem to fly quickly. I can foresee a period of sweet leisure burdened with patient philosophical meditations. Nor shall I shirk worshipping the Muse in the mornings or in the evenings.

Lines 45-58

My friend (Coleridge), I have not been in the habit of recording my impressions immediately in words. Up to now I poured forth the deepest feelings of my heart in harmonious poetry which I could never forget and which is recorded here. I made a prophecy which was addressed to the open fields. Lines of poetry came to me naturally, giving expression in a religious garb to a refreshed spirit which, so I hoped, was singled out for writing poetry of spiritual exaltation. My own voice encouraged me, and, more than that, I was cheered by the internal echo of the imperfect outward sound. I listened to both these voices, and drew from both of them a cheerful confidence in things to come.

Lines 59-85

I was quite contented, and felt inclined to let my intense desire for writing poetry rest for some time. I walked on with quick and eager steps, and at last reached a green shady place where I sat down under a tree, deliberately relaxing my thoughts

Subsiding into a mood of serene happiness

And settling into gentler happiness.

'Twas autumn, and a clear and placid day,
With warmth, as much as needed, from a sun

Two hours declined towards the west ; a day
With silver clouds, and sunshine on the grass,

And in the sheltered and the sheltering grove

A perfect stillness. Many were the thoughts

Encouraged and dismissed, till choice was made

Of a known Vale, whither my feet should turn,

Nor rest till they had reached the very door

Of the one cottage which methought I saw

No picture of mere memory ever looked

So fair ; and while upon the fancied scene

I gazed with growing love, a higher power

Than Fancy gave assurance of some work

Of glory there forthwith to be begun,

Perhaps too there performed. Thus long I mused,

Nor e'er lost sight of what I mused upon,

Save where, amid the stately grove of oaks,

Now here, now there, an acorn, from its cup

Dislodged, through sere leaves rustled, or at once

To the bare earth dropped with a startling sound.

From that soft couch I rose not, till the sun

Had almost touched the horizon ; casting then

A backward glance upon the curling cloud

Of city smoke, by distance ruralized ;

Keen as a Truant or a Fugitive,

But as a Pilgrim resolute, I took,

Even with the chance equipment of that hour,

The road that pointed toward the chosen Vale.

It was a splendid evening, and my soul

Once more made trial of her strength, nor lacked

Aeolian visitations ; but the harp

Was soon defrauded, and the banded host

Of harmony dispersed in straggling sounds

And lastly utter silence ! 'Be it so ;

Why think of anything but present good ?'

So, like a home-bound labourer I pursued

So like a labourer who goes homewards after the

day's work, I pursued.

*Crossed the
meridian two
hours ago.
Contented & later
dismissed by me.*

*Increasing
love is only
imaginative*

*I took to the road
though I was not
equipped for the
journey -
Soul visited by voice
deemed to play about it -*

*Why to think about
anything but the present
joy*

*Shelter from sun -
gave me shelter.*

*was visualised by me
no more mental picture
we looked so attractive.*

*attractive scene
higher power was
fully assured me
that I would start at end
work there.*

(85)

*were a part of nature
herself.*

*my soul put to test its
capacity & strength.*

*Gradually I grew
weaker & weaker.*

Ref'd to be so, I thought -

70

80

90

100

and subsiding into a mood of serene happiness. It was a clear and placid day in autumn. The sun, which had crossed the meridian two hours ago, was giving out just as much heat as one would have desired. There were silvery clouds in the sky, and sunrays were falling on the grass below. A perfect stillness prevailed in the grove which was sheltered from the sun and offered shelter to me. Many thoughts about the choice of a place were first entertained by me and then dismissed after some consideration. Eventually a known valley to which my feet should turn was selected, and my thoughts kept on moving until they had reached the very door of one particular cottage which my mind visualized. No mere mental picture ever looked so attractive. As I gazed upon the cottage with increasing love in my imagination, a power higher than Fancy assured me that I would begin some work of glory while living in that cottage and would perhaps finish it there. In this way, I reflected for a long time without losing sight of the subject of my reflections, except when, in the midst of the majestic grove of oak trees an acorn fell from its cup making a rustling sound as it fell through the dry leaves, or when a fruit at once dropped to the bare ground with a startling sound.

Lines 86-100

I did not rise from that soft couch till the sun was about to set. Then I cast a backward glance upon the column of city smoke which appeared charming to me from a distance, as if it were a part of Nature herself. I was as keen about going as a truant or a fugitive, but I was as determined to go to my destination as a pilgrim is to reach his holy place. I took the road that led towards the valley which I had chosen, although I was not properly equipped for the journey at that moment. It was a fine evening, and once again my soul put to test its own power and capacity. My soul was visited by the breeze which seemed to play upon it as on a harp. In the beginning there was sweet music, but then gradually it grew weaker, and finally died away. "Let it be so", said I to myself, "Why should I think of anything except the present joy?"

Lines 101-131

So, like a labourer who goes homewards after the day's work,
I pursued.....

Sitting down

My way beneath the mellowing sun, that shed
Mild influence ; nor left in me one wish

Again to bend the Sabbath of that time *Give up his sure*
 To a servile yoke. What need of many words ? *from a living world's*

A pleasant loitering journey, through three days
Continued, brought me to my hermitage. *I reached my destination*

I spare to tell of what ensued, the life

In common things—the endless store of things, *interested to be common things*

Rare, or at least so seeming, every day

Found all about me in one neighbourhood—

110

The self-congratulation, and, from morn'g *congratulated myself*
 To night, unbroken cheerfulness serene. *for having selected the place*

But speedily an earnest longing rose

To brace myself to some determined aim,

Reading or thinking, either to lay up

New stores, or rescue from decay the old *to save my previous knowledge from decay*

By timely interference : and therewith

Came hopes still higher, that with outward life

I might endure some airy phantasies *exclusive thoughts*

That had been floating loose about for years, *long hovering in my mind* 120

And to such beings temperately deal forth

The many feelings that oppressed my heart.

That hope hath been discouraged ; welcome light

Dawns from the east, but dawns to disappear *light seems on his serene horizon*

And mock me with a sky that ripens not

Into a steady morning : if my mind,

Remembering the bold promise of the past,

Would gladly grapple with some noble theme,

Vain is her wish ; where'er she turns she finds *whatever subject*

Impediments from day to day renewed. *many clouds in the way of achievement* 130

And now it would content me to yield up

Those lofty hopes awhile, for present gifts *immediate reward*

Of humbler industry. But, O dear Friend ! *of humbler life*

The Poet, gentle creature as he is, *unable to control his thoughts*

Hath, like the lover, his unruly times ; *as a lover is unable to control his emotions*

His fits when he is neither sick nor well,

Though no distress be near him but his own

his own thoughts which are difficult to control

Gentle influence

For some hard work

Did not wish to tell what ensued either late or see magly so

Left an eager desire—delirious aim

Accede to them some other thought

Loathe some noble theme I hardly

When poet is neither ill nor well

my way beneath the setting sun that exercised a gentle influence. There was in me not the least desire to give up my leisure in order to subject myself to the slavery of some hard work. Why should I use many words to describe my condition? After three days' pleasant journey which I made in a loitering manner, I reached my destination. I am not inclined to give a detailed description of what followed. I became interested in common things, in the endless store of things, either rare or seemingly so, which I found around me in that locality. I congratulated myself for having selected such a beautiful place for my residence, and I enjoyed continuous cheerfulness and peace of mind from morning till night every day. Very soon I left an eager desire to prepare myself for some determined aim, such as reading or thinking. I must either study and thus lay up new stores of knowledge, or think and thus save my previous knowledge from being lost and forgotten. With that the still higher hope arose that I might put into communicable form the elusive thoughts which have long been hovering in my mind and ascribe to them in a sober mood the many feelings which burdened my heart. But I felt discouraged. It was as if there were the flashes of light seen on the eastern horizon, but the day itself did not dawn. If my mind, remembering the bold promise of the past, desires to tackle some noble theme gladly, that desire remains unfulfilled. Whatever subject I may choose, difficulties come up in the way of actual achievement from day to day.

Lines 132-145

Now I would even be contented to give up those noble hopes for a while in exchange for immediate rewards of a humbler type of labour. But dear friend, although the poet is a gentle creature, he has to experience moments when he is unable to control his thoughts, just as a lover is helpless in restraining his emotions. There are periods when the poet is neither ill nor well, and his own thoughts,

The poet's mind is pleased to meditate upon some
Chosen thing, ^{Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalan} dwelling upon
her eggs with loving care.

106

THE PRELUDE—BOOK I

Unmanageable thoughts : his mind, best pleased
While she as duteous as the mother dove
Sits brooding, lives not always to that end, ^{Poet doesn't live to that end.} 140
But like the innocent bird, hath goadings on
That drive her as in trouble through the groves :
With me is now such passion, to be blamed ^{I am under sway of such passion.}
No otherwise than as it lasts too long. ^{blame it as it lasts much longer than with other Poets}

When, as is
necessary for a
man.

Is best cheered
by the report.

When, as becomes a man who would prepare
For such an arduous work, I through myself
Make rigorous inquisition, the report ^{Severe self-examination}
Is often cheering ; for I neither seem
To lack that first great gift, the vital soul, ^{organic Sensibility}
Nor general Truths, which are themselves a sort
Of Elements and Agents, Under-powers, ^{the elements which} 150
Subordinate helpers of the living mind : ^{are helpers of mind—}
Nor am I naked of external things, ^{lack possession of external resources—}
Forms, images, nor numerous other aids
Of less regard, though won perhaps with toil ^{Secured by hard work.}
And needful to build up a Poet's praise, ^{needed to build the reputation of Poet.}
Time, place, and manners do I seek, and these
Are found in plenteous store, but nowhere such ^{not in a way}
As may be singled out with steady choice : ^{its permit from choice—}
No little band of yet remembered names ^{no small number of names—} 160

abundant
quantity

Receive them
again—

Temporary
acquisition

Whom I, in perfect confidence, might hope
To summon back from lonesome banishment, ^{dead past}
And make them dwellers in the hearts of men
Now living, or to live in future years, ^{who are living or future +}
Sometimes the ambitious Power of choice, ^{mistaking my ambition}
Proud spring-tide swellings for a regular sea, ^{perpetual—}
Will settle on some British theme, some old ^{British song}
Romantic tale by Milton left unsung ;
More often turning to some gentle place
Within the groves of Chivalry, I pipe ^{Chivalrous} 170
To shepherd swains, or seated harp in hand, ^{harp in my hand}
Amid reposing knights by a river side
Or fountain, listen to the grave reports ^{Serious stories}
Of dire enchantments faced and overcome

Songs for
shepherds

By the strong mind, and tales of warlike feats,

Strong-minded
people

martial exploits

which are difficult to control, trouble him greatly. The poet's mind is pleased best when he meditates upon some chosen subject just as the mother dove is most happy when she broods her eggs with loving care. But at times the poet's mind, goaded out of itself by inspiration, gives up this function ; and is then like the dove who feels an irresistible compulsion to fly through the groves as if she were in trouble. At present I am under the sway of such a passion, but I blame it only because it lasts much longer than with other poets.

Lines 146-157

When, as is necessary for a man who wants to prepare himself for such a hard task, I subject myself to a severe self-examination, I feel cheered by the report : for I do not seem to be lacking in either the first great gift—the organic sensibility—or the apprehension of general truths which are themselves like the elements and agents or helpers of the living mind. Nor do I lack in the possession of external resources like forms and images and many other things which though of lesser importance are nevertheless helpful in building up the poet's reputation and can be acquired by hard labour.

Lines 158-165

I seek appropriate time, place and manners, and find these to be available in plentiful abundance but not in a way as to permit of firm choice. There is no small group of still remembered names whom I might confidently hope to call back from the dead past and make them intimately known to men of my own and the future generations.

Lines 166-185

Sometimes my ambition, so far as the selection of subject-matter is concerned, leads me to mistake a temporary onrush of inspiration for a perpetual one, and makes me think of a theme pertaining to Britain, an old romantic tale which was left unsung by Milton. But more often my mind turns to a subject connected with the chivalrous adventures of knights, and I sing songs for the ears of shepherds ; or I sit down, with a harp in my hand, among knights who are relaxing by the side of a river or fountain, and listen to stories of enchantments which the strong-minded people faced and overcame and tales of martial exploits—

Spear clashed Spear.

Where spear encountered spear, and sword with sword
 Fought, as if conscious of the blazonry *weapons were aware*
 That the shield bore, so glorious was the strife; *grand the warlike*
 Whence inspiration for a song that winds *derived inspiration* 180
 Through ever-changing scenes of votive quest
 Wrongs to redress, harmonious tribute paid
 To patient courage and unblemished truth,
 To firm devotion, zeal unquenchable, *insatiable enthusiasm*
 And Christian meekness hallowing faithful loves. *enders faithful love*
 Sometimes, more sternly moved, I would relate *Sacred*
 How vanquished Mithridates northward passed, *narrating the story of*
 And, hidden in the cloud of years, became *'Mithridates'*
 Odin, *the Father of a race by whom Father of race who defeated the*
 Perished the Roman Empire: *how the friends* *'Romans'* 190
 And followers of Sertorius, out of Spain *blatant of Spain*
 Flying, found shelter in the Fortunate Isles,
 And left their usages, their arts and laws, *where their culture &*
 To disappear by a slow gradual death, *Laws die because of*
disuse -
 To dwindle and to perish one by one, *members died of hunger*
 Starved in those narrow bounds: but not the soul
 Of liberty, *which fifteen hundred years*
 Survived, and, when the European came
 With skill and power that might not be withstood, *irresistible*
 Did, like a pestilence, maintain its hold *hold like pestilence* 200
 And wasted down by glorious death that race
 Of natural heroes: or I would record
 How, in tyrannic times, some high-souled man,
 Unnamed among the chronicles of kings,
 Suffered in silence for Truth's sake: or tell,
 How that one Frenchman, through continued force *Dominique*
 Of meditation on the inhuman deeds
 Of those who conquered first the Indian Isles,
 Went single in his ministry across
 The Ocean; *not to comfort the appressed, not to seduce the oppressed*
 But, like a thirsty wind, to roam about *like a hot wind and desiring* 210
 Withering the Oppressor: how Gustavus sought
 Help at his need in Dalecarlia's mines:
 How Wallace fought for Scotland; left the name

*Endurance**Carmichael's
Odin**Spirit of
Liberty -**center pressure
of meditation*

of spear clashing against spear and sword against sword with a determination which made it seem it as if these weapons were aware of the glorious tradition to which the heroes using them belonged. From such stories I derived inspiration for writing a poem about the gallant and determined search by warriors in different places for opportunities of redressing the wrongs, and paying a tribute in musical language to people of courage and endurance, of pure truth and firm devotion, of never-ending enthusiasm and Christian humility which renders faithful love sacred.

Lines 186-220

Sometimes, more sternly moved, I would think of narrating the story of Mithridates, who after his defeat moved towards the north and after leading an obscure life turned into Odin whose race brought about the downfall of the Roman empire. Or I would like to describe how the friends and followers of Sertorius, the Roman general, fled out of Spain and took shelter in the Fortunate Isles where their culture and laws gradually died out because of disuse. Their race disappeared gradually in course of time as the members died of hunger one by one. But the spirit of liberty in them survived for fifteen hundred years ; and when the Europeans came there with irresistible skill and strength, it still maintained its hold like a pestilence on those natural heroes who died a glorious death. Or I would like to relate how in despotic times some high-minded man, not mentioned in the chronicles of kings, endured great suffering for the sake of truth. Or I would like to narrate the story of the Frenchman Dominique de Gourages, who under pressure of a continuous meditation on the inhuman actions of the first conquerors of the Indian Isles, went single-handed across the ocean on his mission of solace. He went there not to comfort his suffering countrymen, but to roam about like a hot wind and destroy the oppressors. Or I would like to write an account of how Gustavus sought help in the mining district of Dalecarlia at the time of need. Or I would like to narrate the story

Wallace found for Scot land and left his name to
 be found in a valley where the
Coramby -

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalan Jammu

110

THE PRELUDE—BOOK

Of Wallace to be found, like a wild flower,
 All over his dear Country ; left the deeds

Of Wallace, like a family of Ghosts, *There is hardly a valley,*
 To people the steep rocks and river banks, *river bank or*
 Her natural sanctuaries, with a local soul *hill-side which is not*
 Of independence and stern liberty. *peopled with lovers of*
freedom. 220

Sometimes it suits me better to invent
 A tale from my own heart, more near akin

To my own passions and habitual thoughts *related to my thought*
 Some variegated story, in the main *and passions -*

Lofty, but the unsubstantial structure melts *flimsy structure*
 Before the very sun that brightens it, *poetic passions*
 Mist into air dissolving ! Then a wish,
 My last and favourite aspiration, mounts *cherished ambitions arises*

With yearning toward some philosophic song
 Of Truth that cherishes our daily life ; *universal truth* 230
 With meditations passionate from deep *give strength and substance*
 Recesses in man's heart, immortal verse *to our daily life -*

Thoughtfully fitted to the Orphean lyre ;
 But from this awful burden I full soon *song to lift from the*
 Take refuge and beguile myself with trust *thought of under taking*
 That mellow years will bring a ripper mind *this awful burden -*

And clearer insight. Thus my days are past
 In contradiction ; with no skill to part *no ability to separate*
 Vague longing, haply bred by want of power, *lack of ability*
 From paramount impulse not be withstood, *discretion from* 240

A timorous capacity, from prudence, *timidity -*
 From circumspection, infinite delay. *cautious from pulling off*
 Humility and modest awe, themselves *things for an indefinite period -*
 Betray me, serving often for a cloak *my humility's timidity born of*

To a more subtle selfishness ; that now *cover -*
 Locks every function up in blank reserve, *subtle kind of selfishness.*
 Now dupes me, trusting to an anxious eye *selfishness paralyzes my*
 That with intrusive restlessness beats off *faculties -*

Simplicity and self-presented truth.

Ah ! better far than this, to stray about *wandering purposelessly*

Voluptuously through fields and rural walks,
fields and plains -

250

Sometimes it deceives me by intruding upon me and
working against the simplicity and truth which
offer themselves to me for expression -

COMPLETE PARAPHRASE

111

of Wallace who fought for Scotland and left his name to be found like a wild flower all over his country. He inspired his countrymen with his own love of freedom, and in Scotland there is hardly a valley, river-bank or hillside which is not peopled with lovers of freedom.

Lines 221-249

Sometimes it suits me better to narrate a story invented by my imagination and more closely related to my own thoughts and passions. It might be a story consisting of diverse elements with a predominantly lofty note, but the very intensity of my poetic passion seems to melt the flimsy structure of the story, making it dissolve into air. Then my most cherished ambition arises in my heart—namely, that of writing a philosophical poem which will tell of such universal truths as give strength and sustenance to our daily life. It will be a noble poem enriched with my meditation on passions that lie deep in the human heart, and I hope to compose verses fit to be sung to the accompaniment of the lyre of Orpheus. But very soon I retreat from the thought of undertaking this awful burden, and seek escape in the thought that my advancing years will make my mind more mature and give me a clearer insight. Thus every day I am plagued by my contradictory thoughts; and I lack the power to distinguish the irresistible inner urge from a vague desire born of lack of ability, discretion from timidity, and caution from the habit of putting off things for an indefinite period. My humility and timidity born of my modesty let me down, as they often become merely a cover for a subtle kind of selfishness in me. Sometimes this selfishness paralyses my faculties, and sometimes it deceives me by intruding upon me and working against the simplicity and truth which offer themselves to me for expression.

Lines 250-269

It would be better for me to idle away my time in wandering purposelessly through fields and plains,.....

(233 line)
Orpheus was honored
by the Greeks as a
mystical poet - Son of
Muse Calliope - His lyre was
given to him by Apollo.

Keeping no record of time spent -

THE PRELUDE—BOOK I

And ask no record of the hours, resigned *on musing over things -*

To vacant musing, unproved neglect *and enjoying a deliberate*
Of all things, and deliberate holiday. *holiday -*

Far better never to have heard the name *nurse to have zeal or*
Of zeal and just ambition, than to live *ambition -*

Baffled and plagued by a mind that every hour *turns cowardly*
Turns recreant to her task ; takes heart again, *away -*

Then feels immediately some hollow thought *acts as deterrent*
Hang like an interdict upon her hopes. *to all cherished hopes -*

This is my lot ; for either still I find *Something lacking in*
Some imperfection in the chosen theme, *the one -*

Or see of absolute accomplishment *full accomplishment will*
Much wanting, so much wanting, in myself, *elude me.*

That I recoil and droop, and seek repose *relaxation*
In listlessness from vain perplexity, *unprofitable babblement*
Unprofitably travelling toward the grave, *marking towards grave*
Like a false steward who hath much received *without fulfilment.*

And renders nothing back.

Was it for this

That one, *the fairest of all rivers, loved (Derwent River)*
To blend his murmurs with my nurse's song,
And, from his alder shades and rocky falls, *sent a voice, which*
And from his fords and shallows, *sent a voice, which*
That flowed along my dreams ? For this, didst thou, *was audible to me -*
in dreams.

O Derwent ! winding among grassy holms
Where I was looking on, a babe in arms,

Make ceaseless music that composed my thoughts
To more than infant softness, giving me
Amid the fretful dwellings of mankind *best with worldly thoughts*
A foretaste, a dim earnest, of the calm *a foretaste of peace and*
That Nature breathes among the hills and groves. *calm*

When he had left the mountains and received *Derwent, flows*
On his smooth breast the shadow of those towers *into the plains*
That yet survive, a shattered monument
Of feudal sway, the bright blue river passed
Along the margin of our terrace walk ; *side of terrace walk -*
A tempting playmate whom we dearly loved.

It was for us a dearly loved playmate.

*How to aspire
Something and
subter perplexity*

unfortunate lot

*Like a steward who is
always at receiving
and - does not give*

*Sliver border
thoughts on one.*

*Flowing no
coherence
castle -
(symbolic of
feudal system)*

keeping no record of the time spent on musing over things and enjoying a deliberate holiday. It would have been better not to have ever known zeal or ambition rather than to aspire something and suffer the unspeakable agony of a perplexed mind that turns cowardly away from the task which it has set for itself. My mind once braces itself up, and then immediately falters under the stress of some foolish notion that acts as a deterrent to all its cherished hopes. Such is my unfortunate lot that either I find something lacking in the theme selected or find that full accomplishment will elude me because of my own limitations which are such as to make me retreat from my determination and languish and try to find in sheer inaction an escape from the unprofitable bafflement which has taken hold of me. So I find myself travelling towards the grave without doing anything useful; and my condition is that of a dishonest steward who is always at the receiving end and never gives back anything in return.

Lines 270-300

Was it for this that the Derwent, the fairest of all rivers, lulled my during my infancy with its murmuring sound and from its shades and falls, fords and shallows sent a voice which was audible to me in my dreams? O Derwent, was it for this that you, following your winding course through the grassy meadows which I used to gaze at in my infancy, produced constant music which stirred tender thoughts in me, and gave me in the midst of human beings beset with worldly anxieties a foretaste of the peace and calm that subsist in the heart of Nature? When the river Derwent, after leaving the mountains, flowed into the plains, it received on its smooth surface the shadow of the still surviving towers of Cockermouth castle, the symbols of decayed feudal system. The bright blue river passed along the side of our terrace walk. It was for us a dearly loved playmate.

when I was 5 year old child.

Oh, many a time have I, a five years' child,

In a small mill-race severed from his stream, ^{position of river which liberate a me and}

Made one long bathing of a summer's day ;

290

Basked in the sun, and plunged and basked again

Alternate, all a summer's day, or scoured ^{ran about}

The sandy fields, leaping through flowery groves

Of yellow ragwort ; or, when rock and hill,

The woods, and distant Skiddaw's lofty height,

Were bronzed with deepest radiance, stood alone

Beneath the sky, as if I had been born

On Indian plains, and from my mother's hut

Had run abroad in wantonness, to sport ^{run out playfully}

A naked savage, in the thunder shower. ^{to play like a naked}

300

^{Savage in the thunder shower.}

Fair seed-time had my soul, and I grew up ^{favorable}

Fostered alike by beauty and by fear : ^{Environment}

Much favoured in my birthplace, and no less ^{likely to be born at}

In that beloved Vale to which ere long ^{Estwait-}

We were transplanted;—there were we let loose

For sports of wider range. Ere I had told

Ten birth-days, when among the mountain-slopes

Frost, and the breath of frosty wind, had snapped

The last autumnal crocus, 't was my joy

With store of springes o'er my shoulder hung ^{awful bird traps}

To range the open heights were woodcocks ran ^{slung over my shoulders.}

310

Among the smooth green turf. Through half the night,

Scudding away from snare to snare, I plied ^{from snare to}

That anxious visitation ;—moon and stars ^{snare.}

Were shining o'er my head. I was alone,

And seemed to be a trouble to the peace ^{disturb peace that was}

That dwelt among them. Sometimes it befell ^{there.}

In these night wanderings, that a strong desire ^{predominated my}

O'erpowered my better reason, and the bird ^{better reason.}

Which was the captive of another's toil

Became my prey ; and when the deed was done

320

I heard among the solitary hills

Low breathings coming after me, and sounds

Of undistinguishable motion, steps ^{which I cannot interpret.}

Almost as silent as the turf they trod.

^{Footsteps following me with a motion}

^{that was as silent as the grass on}

^{green hills.}

When I was a child of five years, I many times spent the whole day bathing in that portion of the river which turned a mill-wheel. I alternately bathed in the river and basked in the warm light of the sun ; or ran about in the sandy fields, leaping through flowery groves of yellow ragwort. Or, when the rock and hill, the woods, and the top of the distant Skiddaw mountain took on a bronze hue from the light of the sun, I would stand alone under the sky, as if I had been born on Indian plains, and had playfully run out of my mother's hut to play like a naked savage in the thunder shower.

Lines 301-325

My soul had a most favourable environment for its development, and I grew up, nourished by both beauty and fear. I was lucky in having been born at Cockermouth, and I was equally lucky in having been removed to the beautiful valley of Esthwaite where we enjoyed greater variety and freedom in our sports. Before I had reached the age of ten, when the frost and the cold wind had snapped the last autumnal crocus, I found pleasure in roaming over the open heights, where wood-cocks used to run over the smooth green grass, with bird-traps slung over my shoulders. Through half the night I went anxiously from snare to snare under the light of the moon and the stars. I used to be alone, and I felt that I was disturbing the peace that prevailed there. Sometimes it so happened that, in the course of these nocturnal wanderings, a strong desire predominated over my better reason, and I took possession of a bird which was the reward of somebody else's labour. After I had done this deed, I heard among the solitary hills, low sounds coming after me, and I heard sounds of movement which I could not interpret, and also footsteps following me with a motion that was as silent as the grass on which they fell.

Nor less, when spring had warmed the cultured Vale,
Moved we as plunderers where the mother-bird
Had in high places built her lodge; though mean
Our object and inglorious, yet the end *Sordid aims*
Was not ignoble. Oh! when I have hung *was hanging over*
Above the raven's nest, by knots of grass *lawns on it.* 330
And half-inch fissures in the slippery rock *narrow openings*
But ill sustained, and almost (so it seemed) *lifted by wind over*
Suspended by the blast that blew amain, *naked rocks -*
Shouldering the naked crag, oh, at that time

While on the perilous ridge I hung alone,
With what strange utterance did the loud dry wind *uttering strange*
Blow through my ear! the sky seemed not a sky *things as it blew*
Of earth—and with what motion moved the clouds!
Clouds seemed to move mysteriously.

Dust as we are, the immortal spirit grows *immortal soul grows*
Like harmony in music; there is a dark *like musical harmony.* 340
Inscrutable workmanship that reconciles *which welds together*
Discordant elements, makes them cling together *discrepant elements*
In one society. How strange, that all
The terrors, pains, and early miseries,
Regrets, vexations, lassitudes interfused *have become a part of*
Within my mind, should e'er have borne a part, *my life when I have*
And that a needful part, in making up *become worthy of*
The calm existence that is mine when I
Am worthy of myself! Praise to the end! 350

Thanks to the means which Nature deigned to employ;
Whether her fearless visitings, or those
That come with soft alarm, like hurtless light
Opening the peaceful clouds; or she may use
Severer interventions, ministry *nature might have employed*
More palpable, as best might suit her aim *severer measures to create*
as might suit her aim.

One summer evening (led by her) I found
A little boat tied to a willow tree
Within a rocky cave, its usual home.
Straight I unloosed her chain, and stepping in 360

untied the chain

Lines 326-339

Our activities continued unabated when the spring season made the valley burst into flowers ; for then we wandered about like robbers in search of the high places where the mother-bird might have built a nest. Though our aim was sordid, Nature directed all our adventures to some great aim. When I was hanging above the raven's nest, supporting myself precariously by holding tight to tufts of grass and narrow openings in the slippery rock, it seemed to me that I was lifted up by the wind that blew furiously on the naked rock. At that time while I hung alone on the perilous ridge, I felt as if the loud dry wind was uttering strange things as it blew through my ears. The sky overhead did not appear in its usual aspect, and the clouds seemed to move mysteriously.

Lines 340-356

Although we are made of dust, the immortal soul within us grows like harmony in music. Nature has a secret incomprehensible workmanship which welds together discordant elements and establishes a sort of relationship among them. It is very strange that all the terrors, pains, sufferings, regrets, irritations and moods of lassitude spread through my mind should have played a necessary part in generating that quiet which is a part of my life when I have become worthy of myself. I am grateful for what has been achieved ; and let me thank Nature for the means which she has employed, whether they were her fearless visitings, or those that came with a mild feeling of alarm like the light that seems to part the clouds without hurting them. Nature might even have employed severer measures to create a more tangible effect, as might best suit her aim.

Lines 357-400

One summer evening I was led by Nature to find a little boat tied to a willow tree inside a rocky cave where it usually lay. I immediately united the chain ; and jumping into the boat,

Pushed from the shore. It was an act of stealth *act of stealing*
And troubled pleasure, nor without the voice
Of mountain-echoes did my boat move on ;
Leaving behind her still, on either side,
Small circles glittering idly in the moon,
Until they melted all into one track

fixed direction
Of sparkling light. But now, like one who rows,
Proud of his skill, to reach a chosen point
With an unswerving line, I fixed my view
Upon the summit of a craggy ridge,
The horizon's utmost boundary ; for above
Was nothing but the stars and the grey sky.

370

fairy-like appearance
She was an elfin pinnacle ; lustily
I dipped my oars into the silent lake,
And, as I rose upon the stroke, my boat
Went heaving through the water like a swan ;
When, from behind that craggy steep till then
The horizon's bound, a huge peak, black and huge,

huge structure seemed to interpose between our sails.
As if with voluntary power instinct
Upreared its head. I struck and struck again,
And growing still in stature the grim shape
Towered up between me and the stars, and still,

380

boat towered was harboured
For so it seemed, with purpose of its own
And measured motion like a living thing,
Strode after me. With trembling oars I turned,
And through the silent water stole my way
Back to the covert of the willow tree ;

I oared back with trembling hands
There in her mooring-place I left my bark, —
And through the meadows homeward went, in grave
And serious mood ; but after I had seen
That spectacle, for many days, my brain
Worked with a dim and undetermined sense

brain was perplexed by vague feelings
Of unknown modes of being ; o'er my thoughts
There hung a darkness, call it solitude
Or blank desertion. No familiar shapes

dim sense of loneliness
Remained, no pleasant images of trees,
O sea or sky, no colours of green fields ;
But huge and mighty forms, that do not live

darkness was
Scarcely conscious
Of the familiar objects
Behind me.

pushed it away from the shore. It was an act of stealing which gave me pleasure mingled with apprehension. As the boat moved on, the sound of rowing echoed through the mountains. It left behind it on both sides small circles of water glittering idly under the light of the moon until they joined and became a single track of bright light. But now, like a person who is proud of his skill in rowing and rows his boat steadily in one fixed direction to reach a chosen point, I fixed my eyes on the top of a craggy ridge which seemed to be the farthest boundary because beyond it was nothing except the stars and the sky. My boat had a fairy-like appearance. I put the oars into the water with my full strength, and as I propelled the boat, it glided upon the water like a swan. At this point from behind that craggy ridge, which had so far been the utmost limit of the horizon, a huge black peak raised its head as if it were a living being with a will of its own. I struck the water with my oars again and again, and the terrible peak seemed to increase in size till its huge stature seemed to interpose itself between me and the stars. And it seemed to me that the peak followed me with a deliberate movement as if it were a living thing possessed of will power. I turned back with the oars in my trembling hands, and through the silent water returned fearfully to the shelter of the willow tree. I left the boat at the place where it was harboured, and went home through the meadows in a grave and serious mood. But for many days after I had witnessed that spectacle, my brain was perplexed by a vague feeling that there were beings whose existence was unrealized by men. An acute sense of remoteness from the material world darkened my thoughts, and I felt that there was a complete vacuum in my mind. I was scarcely conscious of the familiar objects around me—the green fields, the sky, the trees and the sea, but there were always present with me, both day and night,

Present with me huge forms which had a life unlike
the life of human beings—

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

120

THE PRELUDE—BOOK I

Like living men, moved slowly through the mind
By day, and were a trouble to my dreams.

400

Wisdom and spirit of the universe (the soul of nature).

Wisdom and Spirit of the universe !

Thou Soul that art the eternity of thought

That givest to forms and images a breath

And everlasting motion, not in vain

By day or star-light thus from my first dawn

Of childhood didst thou intertwine for me

The passions that build up our human soul ;

Not with the mean and vulgar works of man,

But with high objects, with enduring things—

With life and nature—purifying thus

The elements of feeling and of thought,

And sanctifying, by such discipline,

Both pain and fear, until we recognise

A grandeur in the beatings of the heart.

Nor was this fellowship vouchsafed to me

With stinted kindness. In November days,

When vapours rolling down the valley made

A lonely scene more lonesome, among woods,

At noon and 'mid the calm of summer nights,

When, by the margin of the trembling lake,

Beneath the gloomy hills homeward I went

In solitude, such intercourse was mine ;

Mine was it in the fields both day and night,

And by the waters, all the summer long.

And in the frosty season, when the sun

Was set, and visible for many a mile

The cottage windows blazed through twilight gloom,

I heeded not their summons : happy time

It was indeed for all of us—for me

It was a time of rapture ! Clear and loud

The village clock tolled six,—I wheeled about,

Proud and exulting like an untired horse

That cares not for his home. All shod with steel,

We hissed along the polished ice in games

Confederate, imitative of the chase

430

huge and mighty forms which had a life unlike the life of human beings.

Lines 401-424

Wisdom and Spirit of the universe (the Soul of Nature), you who are as eternal as human thoughts, you shape matter into different forms which it bears and give to these forms the life and movement that they have. It was not in vain that, ever since the dawn of consciousness, by day and by night, you established a close relationship between the human passions in my heart with the high objects in the universe, with life and with nature, so as to purify my feelings and thoughts and render sacred through such discipline both pain and fear until I am enabled to recognize grandeur of common things. You granted me this kind of companionship with an open heart. In November days, when the vapours moving down the valley accentuated the loneliness of the scene, in the woods, at noon and in the quiet of summer nights, when I went homeward alone by the margin of the quivering lake under the hills enveloped in a gloomy atmosphere, I enjoyed such companionship. I enjoyed it in the fields both by day and night, and all through summer by the side of rivers and lakes.

Lines 425-437

And in the winter season, when the sun had set and the light of the cottages could be seen from miles away through the darkness of the twilight, I paid no heed to their call. It was, indeed, a happy time for all of us ; but for me it was a time of rapture. The village clock announced the hour of six clearly and loudly. I went about the place, exulting in my own happiness like a horse who is still unexhausted and does not care to return home yet. With metal skates strapped to our feet, we moved on the polished ice with a hissing sound, playing collective games. In our sports we tried

And woodland pleasures,—the resounding horn,

The pack loud chiming, and the hunted hare.

So through the darkness and the cold we flew, *Skated over the ice -*

And not a voice was idle ; with the din *flap mountains*

Smitten, the precipices rang aloud ; *Resounded with noise -* 440

The leafless trees and every icy crag

Tinkled like iron ; while far distant hills *echoed the tinkling*

Into the tumult sent an alien sound *Sound of Skates.*

Of melancholy not unnoticed, while the stars

Eastward were sparkling clear, and in the west

The orange sky of evening died away. *Ray was suffused with the orange colour of sunset.*

Not seldom from the uproar I retired

Into a silent bay, or sportively

Glanced sideway, leaving the tumultuous throng, *noisy crowd.*

To cut across the reflex of a star

That fled, and, flying still before me, gleamed

Upon the grassy plain ; and oftentimes,

When we had given our bodies to the wind,

And all the shadowy banks on either side

Came sweeping through the darkness, spinning still

The rapid lines of motion, then at once

Have I, reclining back upon my heels, *absolutely being a slothly leaning backwards*

Stopped short ; yet still the solitary cliffs

Wheeled by me—even as if the earth had rolled

With visible motion her diurnal round ! *moving round.*

Behind me did they stretch in solemn train, *Solemn Procession* 460

Feebler and feebler, and I stood and watched

Till all was tranquil as a dreamless sleep.

Spiritual force of Nature

Ye Presences of Nature in the sky

And on the earth ! Ye Visions of the hills !

And Souls of lonely places ! can I think *you used such words of thinking*

A vulgar hope was yours when ye employed *on my mind.*

Such ministry, when ye, through many a year

Haunting me thus among my boyish sports, *you haunted me in this manner in midst of boyish games.*

On caves and trees, upon the woods and hills,

Impressed, upon all forms, the characters

*The trees and on the trees
on the woods and upon the hills -
all objects -*

to enact the chase scene, with sounds of the horn blowing, and of the dogs chasing a hare.

Lines 438-463

We skated over the ice, moving swiftly through the cold and the darkness. As we skated, we made a loud noise. The steep mountains resounded with the noise made by us ; the leafless trees and the icy crags also echoed the tinkling sounds made by the skates. The hills at a great distance returned melancholy sounds of an altogether different timbre to mingle with all this noise. As that time the stars could be seen sparkling clearly in the east while the western sky was still suffused with the orange colour of sunset. I frequently withdrew myself from the noisy scene into a silent bay, or playfully ran sideways, leaving the noisy crowd, to skate over the reflection of a star, but the reflection of the star would move ahead clearly shining in the ice which looked like a clear mirror. Many times, when we had freely been skating over the ice, with the wind hitting our bodies, and with all the dim banks on either side coming with a rapid movement through the darkness, I would, after going round and round in circles, abruptly bring myself to a stop by leaning backwards. Then I would feel as if the lonely mountains were swiftly passing past me and as though I could see with physical eyes the earth moving about on its daily round. Gradually the movement of these rocks, which seemed to stretch behind me in a solemn procession, become slower and slower ; and I stood and watched till the whole scene was as peaceful as a sleep undisturbed by any dreams.

Lines 464-478

O spiritual forces of the sky and the earth ! O souls of the hills and solitary places ! It was with some noble hope that you used such ways of working on my mind, when for many years you haunted me in this manner in the midst of my boyish games, in the caves and on the trees, in the woods and upon the hills, and made all objects seem

Predman K. L. Ch. B. A.
M.A. (Pol. Sc. Eco. Eng. Hist.) B.Ed.
Motiyar Rainawati
SRINAGER-190003
KASHMIR

dangerous or desirable -

Of danger or desire ; and thus did make *you this way you made the Earth's Surface work like a sea*
 The surface of the universal earth, *things to himself and delight; heat and*
 With triumph and delight, with hope and fear, *hope.*
 Work like a sea?

Not uselessly employed, I would regard it as *useful task to go on*
 Might I pursue this theme through every change *working about this theme.*
 Of exercise and play, to which the year *through all the games and*
 Did summon us in his delightful round. *Exercises which I engaged with*
the change in seasons:

We were a noisy crew ; the sun in heaven
 Beheld not vales more beautiful than ours :
 Nor saw a band in happiness and joy *our wealth and happiness*
 Richer, or worthier of the ground they trod. *were more worthy than others.* 480

I could record with no reluctant voice *willing voice -*
 The woods of autumn, and their hazel bowers *(names of flowers)*
 With milk-white clusters hung ; the rod and line *fighting rod and line*
 True symbol of hope's foolishness, whose strong
 And unreprieved enchantment led us on *strong and innocent pleasure*
 By rocks and pools shut out from every star. *led us by rocks & pools -*

All the green summer, to forlorn cascades *unvisited cascades -*
 Among the windings hid of mountain brooks. *hidden winding of mountain stream* 490

—Unfading recollections ! at this hour
 The heart is almost mine with which I felt.
 From some hill-top on sunny afternoons,
 The paper kite high among fleecy clouds *fleece-like clouds.*
 Pull at her rein like an impetuous courser *manner of a strong horse pulling reins -*
 Or, from the meadows sent on gusty days,
 Beheld her breast the wind, then suddenly
 Dashed headlong, and rejected by the storm.

Ye lowly cottages wherein we dwelt, *humble cottages*
 A ministration of your own was yours ; *you had your ministry* 500
 Can I forget you, being as you were
 So beautiful among the pleasant fields
 In which ye stood ? or can I here forget
 The plain and seemly countenance with which *your plain shape -*
 Ye dealt out your plain comforts ? Yet had ye
 Delights and exultations of your own.

you had delights and exultations of your own.

noisy group of boys.

Symbol of foolishness of hope.

memory did linger in me -

on windy days - the kite would go up in sky blowing the birds till it would be dashed to pieces

" addresses cottage."

dangerous or desirable. In this way you made the earth's surface work like a sea, through triumph and delight, hope and fear. I would regard it as a useful task to go on writing about this theme through all the games and exercises which changed with the change of season.

Lines 479-498

We were a noisy group of boys. The sun in the sky did not shine on a valley more beautiful than ours, nor was there a group of boys richer in happiness and joy than we or worthier than ourselves to walk on that ground. With a most willing voice could I give an account of the autumnal woods, with their hazel bowers laden with milk-white bunches of flowers. We had with us a fishing-rod and the line which could be regarded as a symbol of the foolishness of our hopes, and the strong and innocent pleasure of fishing led us on by the side of the rocks and pools which did not receive the light of any star; all through the green summer we explored lonely waterfalls among the hidden windings of mountain streams. The memory of these days is still distinct in my mind. I still remember the raptures with which I watched on sunny afternoons from some hill-top the paper-kite high among fleece-like clouds, pulling at its string in the manner of a strong horse pulling at its reins; on windy days the kite would go up in the sky braving the winds, but was soon dashed to the ground by the storm.

Lines 499-520

O you humble cottages in which we lived! You also had your own ministry. I cannot forget you for you looked so beautiful among the pleasant fields in which you stood; nor can I forget the simple and pleasant countenance with which you extended your homely comforts to us. You had delights and exultations of your own.

*we enjoyed our indoor games at home eagerly and without
feeling tired at the side of heat-fire in the evenings-*

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantala Jammu

126

THE PRELUDE—BOOK I

Eager and never weary we pursued
Our home-amusements by the warm peat-fire
At evening, when with pencil, and smooth slate
In square divisions parcelled out and all
With crosses and with cyphers scribbled o'er, *scattered over* 510
We schemed and puzzled, head opposed to head
In strife too humble to be named in verse: *tried poetry*
Or round the naked table, snow-white deal,
Cherry or maple, sate in close array, *Sat in close arrangement*
And to the combat, Loo or Whist, led on
A thick-ribbed army; not, as in the world, *Heating cards as*
Neglected and ungratefully thrown by. *Soldiers, not neglected*
Even for the very service they had wrought, *or repeated but*
But husbanded through many a long campaign. *preserved for fight-* 520
Uncouth assemblage was it, where no few
Had changed their functions; some, plebeian cards *ordinary*
Which Fate, beyond the promise of their birth,
Had dignified, and called to represent *represent missing*
The persons of departed potentates. *kings and Queens-*
Oh, with what echoes on the board they fell! *! All on table with*
Ironic diamonds,—clubs, hearts, diamonds, spades, *sounds.*
A congregation piteously akin!
Cheap matter offered they to boyish wit, *Offered cheap matter*
Those sooty knaves, precipitated down *to exercise intelligence of*
With scoffs and taunts, like Vulcan out of heaven; *boys wit-* 530
The paramount ace, a moon in her eclipse, *moon in eclipse*
Queens gleaming through their splendour's last decay, *Queens in eclipse*
And monarchs surly at the wrongs sustained *Monarchs in eclipse*
By royal visages. Meanwhile abroad *Meanwhile abroad*
Incessant rain was falling, or the frost
Raged bitterly, with keen and silent tooth;
And, interrupting oft that eager game, *When interrupted by a loud*
From under Esthwaite's splitting fields of ice *and continuous roaring*
The pent-up air, struggling to free itself, *Sound-*
Gave out to meadow grounds and hills a loud
Protracted yelling, like the noise of wolves
Howling in troops along the Bothnic Main.

*we devised
and puzzled-*

Played-

*Shabby pack of
cards*

*performed
functions for
which no means*

*all looked like
rough workmen
in life -
black knaves*

Howling

*Large numbers
of wolves along the
glacier of Bothnia-*

We enjoyed our indoor games at home eagerly and without feeling tired, by the side of the warm peat-fire in the evenings, when, with pencil and a smooth slate which was divided into squares and marked with crosses and cyphers we puzzled our heads against each other in a struggle too humble to be described in poetry. Or we sat round an uncovered table made of snow-white deal, cherry or maple ; we formed a close group and played Loo or Whist, treating the cards as soldiers who are not neglected or rejected after the fight but carefully saved for many later battles.

Lines 521-543

It was a shabby pack of cards many of which had been assigned functions different from those for which they were originally meant. Some ordinary cards were used to represent the missing Kings and Queens ; so they enjoyed an honour which fate had not granted them at the time of their birth. The cards made a loud noise when they were thrown on the table. They might be clubs, hearts, diamonds or spades ; but all looked alike as they were worn out with use. They offered cheap matter to exercise the intelligence of young boys. There were the black knaves thrown down on the table with taunts and jeers like those which accompanied Vulcan when he was hurled out of heaven by Zeus. There was the high-ranking ace which looked like the moon in eclipse. The queens were in such a faded condition as to suggest the final decay of their magnificence. Their kings appeared to be irritated because of the damage done to their royal countenances. Sometimes when they played comfortably indoors, it would rain heavily or the bitter cold winds would silently cut into their bodies. The eagerly pursued game of cards was often interrupted by a loud and continuous roaring sound coming from the fields and hills and caused by the pent-up air struggling to free itself from under Esthwaite's frozen surface, which broke with a noise that could be compared to the howling of a large number of wolves along the gulf of Bothnia.

*I have not been less careful in describing nature - how
 Nature operating on the mind may find my mind was beautiful and
 Sublime images*

128

THE PRELUDE—BOOK I

Nor, sedulous as I have been to trace
How Nature by extrinsic passion first
Peopled the mind with forms sublime or fair,
And made me love them, may I here omit *enjoyed pleasures which*
How other pleasures have been mine, and joys *arose from subtler*
Of subtler origin ; how I have felt, *Source -*
Not seldom even in that tempestuous time, *Period of passionate boyhood*
Those hallowed and pure motions of the sense *Sacred a Pure 550*
Which seem, in their simplicity, to own *motions of senses -*
An intellectual charm ; that clam delight *Seem to possess intellectual*
Which, if I err not, surely must belong *Charm.*
To those first-born affinities that fit *Of a mortal mistake*
Our new existence to existing things, *must surely belong to those*
And, in our dawn of being, constitute *Primary objections which*
The bond of union between life and joy. *bring harmony between our*
new found existence and this
material world.

*first days of
 our earthly exist-
 lence make union
 between life & joy
 Ten years*

*existed ever since
 the creation of
 world.*

Yes, I remember when the changeful earth, *Changing Earth*
And twice five summers on my mind had stamped *imprinted* 560
The faces of the moving year, even then at that time had
I held unconscious intercourse with beauty *Spiritual Contact*
Old as creation, drinking in a pure *with beauty*
Organic pleasure from the silver wreaths *derived pure Physical pleasure*
Of curling mist, or from the level plain *from the silvery columns*
Of waters coloured by impending clouds *Smooth surface of waters*
Coloured by over-hanging
clouds.

*Pleased to stand
 there*

The sands of Westmoreland, the creeks and bays
Of Cumbria's rocky limits, they can tell *Can bear witness*
How, when the Sea threw off his evening shade, *Cast off darkness*
And to the shepherd's hut on distant hills *gladly noticed by* 570
Sent welcome notice of the rising moon, *Shepherd's*
How I have stood, to fancies such as these *without fancies -*
A stranger, linking with the spectacle *and call to memory scenes*
No conscious memory of a kindred sight, *usually beautiful scenes*
And bringing with me no peculiar sense
Of quietness or peace ; yet have I stood, *eye moved many*
Even while mine eye hath moved o'er many a league *miles -*
Of shining water, gathering as it seemed,
of shining
water -
gathering as it appeared.

Lines 544-558

I have not been less careful in describing how Nature, operating externally, filled my mind with beautiful and sublime images, and so made me love them. Nor can I forget to mention that I have enjoyed other pleasures which arose from a more subtle source. I have often experienced even in that passionate period of boyhood, those sacred and pure motions of the senses which in their simplicity seemed to possess an intellectual charm. I have experienced that calm delight which, if I am not mistaken, must surely belong to those primary affections which bring about a harmonious relationship between our new-found existence and this material world, and in the first days of our earthly existence make the bond of union between our life and joy.

Lines 559-566

Yes, I remember the time when the changing earth and the first ten years of my life had imprinted on my mind the various phases through which a year passes. Even at that time I had a spiritual contact with beauty which has existed ever since the creation of the world; and derived a pure physical pleasure from the silvery columns of curling mist, or from the smooth surface of waters coloured by over-hanging clouds.

Lines 567-580

The sands of Westmoreland and the creeks and bays of Cumbria's rocky boundaries can bear witness to the fact that when the sea had cast off the darkness, which had descended upon it in the evening as a result of the spreading moonlight, which was gladly noticed by the shepherds living in distant huts, I used to stand there looking at the scene without any fancies crossing my mind. I could call to memory no other equally beautiful scenes, and did not bring with me any peculiar sense of calm or peace. Yet did I stand there while my eye moved over many miles of shining water, gathering,

new pleasure from even the smallest portion of THE PRELUDE—BOOK I
bright ocean. Through every hair-breadth in that field of light,
like a bee which sucks in honey from flowers. New pleasure like a bee among the flowers.

accompany promptly.
 Thus oft amid those fits of vulgar joy *unconfined pleasures*⁵⁸⁰
 Which, through all seasons, on a child's pursuits *activities of child*
 Are prompt attendants, 'mid that giddy bliss *intoxicating joy.*
 Which, like a tempest, works along the blood *excites blood & then subsides*
 And is forgotten; even then I felt *perceived days of light similar to those*
 Gleams like the flashing of a shield;—the earth *dedicated in shield.*
 And common face of Nature spake to me *familiar sight of nature*
 Rememberable things; sometimes, 't is true, *spoke to me.*
 By chance collisions and quaint accidents *strange accidents.*

ill-matched unions
 (Like those ill-sorted unions, work supposed
 Of evil-minded fairies), yet not vain

Nor profitless, if haply they impressed
 Collateral objects and appearances,

Albeit lifeless then, and doomed to sleep *Remained dormant.*
 Until maturer seasons called them forth *in my mind.*

To impregnate and to elevate the mind. *Inspired and excited my mind.*
 —And if the vulgar joy by its own weight *bludgeoned.*

Wearied itself out of the memory, *erased from any memory.*
 The scenes which were a witness of that joy

Remained in their substantial lineaments *depicted on brain*
 Depicted on the brain, and to the eye

Were visible, a daily sight; and thus.

By the impressive discipline of fear,

By pleasure and repeated happiness,

So frequently repeated, and by force

Of obscure feelings representative

Of things forgotten, these same scenes so bright,

So beautiful, so majestic in themselves,

Though yet the day was distant, did become

Habitually dear, and all their forms

And changeful colours by invisible links

Were fastened to the affections,

I began

My story early—not misled, I trust,

By an infirmity of love for days

*their forms and changing
 colours became connected
 with my affections by
 iron's steel bonds.*⁶¹⁰
 I was not misled into doing so by a mistaken
 love for my childhood days.

as it appeared, new pleasure from even the smallest portion of the bright ocean, like a bee which sucks in honey from the flowers.

Lines 581-596

Thus many times, in the midst of those unrefined pleasures which accompany promptly all the activities of a child in every season, amid the intoxicating joy which, like a storm, excites the blood and then subsides, I perceived rays of light similar to those reflected from a shield. The earth and the familiar sights of Nature spoke to me memorable things. It is true that sometimes this happened as a result of chance encounters and strange accidents (like those ill-matched unions which are supposed to be the work of malicious fairies), but even these were not fruitless or profitless. They impressed upon my mind objects and images similar to those which I had actually seen with my eyes. Although these objects and shapes seemed to be lifeless then, they remained dormant in my mind until they were called forth at a later date when my powers had matured. Then they inspired and exalted my mind.

Lines 597-612

Though the crude joy was soon erased from my memory because of its very intensity, the scenes which were a witness of that joy remained depicted on my brain in their essential features, and continued to be visible to the eye as a daily sight. In this way, through the impressive discipline of fear, and through repeated happiness and pleasures, and by the force of dimly-understood feelings which were representative of forgotten things, those very scenes, so bright, so beautiful, so majestic in themselves, became dear to me as a matter of habit, though the time of my realization of their full significance was yet far away. And their forms and changing colours became connected with my affections by invisible bonds.

Lines 613-636

I started my story far back in the earliest period of my life. I hope that I was not misled into doing so by a mistaken love for my

as the planting of snowdrops in winter
Disowned by memory—ere the birth of spring *my act was as out-of-season.*
Planting my snowdrops among winter snows :

almost forgotten by
Nor will it seem to thee, O Friend ! so prompt
In sympathy, that I have lengthened out *that I have prolonged an uninteresting tale.*
With fond and feeble tongue a tedious tale. 620

Meanwhile, my hope has been, that I might fetch

Invigorating thoughts from former years ;

Self-accusation
Might fix the wavering balance of my mind, *restore infirm balance.*

And haply meet (reproaches) too, whose power

May spur me on, in manhood now mature *spur me to honourable labour.*
To honourable toil. Yet should these hopes

Prove vain, and thus should neither I be taught

To understand myself, nor thou to know

With better knowledge how the heart was framed

Of him thou lovest ; need I dread from thee *Conscience me.*

Harsh judgments, if the song be loth to quit *hateful to quit.*

Those recollected hours that have the charm 630

Of visionary things, those lovely forms

And sweet sensations that throw back our life,

And almost make remotest infancy *distant infancy*

A visible scene, on which the sun is shining ?

One end at least hath been attained ; my mind

Hath been revived, and if this genial mood *pleasant mood*

Desert me not, forthwith shall be brought down

Through later years the story of my life.

The road lies plain before me ; —'t is a theme

Single and of determined bounds ; and hence 640

I choose it rather at this time, than work

Of ampler or more varied argument, *greater variety*

Where I might be discomfited and lost :

And certain hopes are with me, that to thee

This labour will be welcome, honoured Friend !

I have definite hopes that such a labour will be welcome to you, my honoured friend
"S. T. Coleridge"

childhood days which had almost been forgotten by me. My act was as out of season as the planting of snowdrops in winter before the advent of spring. My friend, you are so prompt in offering your sympathy for me that I hope it will not appear to you that I have deliberately prolonged a dull story by narrating it in a foolish and feeble manner. Meanwhile, it has been my hope to derive invigorating thoughts from my early years so as to restore the infirm balance of my mind and perhaps even meet self-accusation which may spur me on to more honourable labour now in my mature years. But if these hopes should prove futile, and if I find it impossible to understand myself or to increase your knowledge about the constitution of your dear friend's heart, I do not think that you will censure me on seeing that I am unwilling to leave those past hours of my childhood which possess the charm of visionary things, those beautiful forms and sweet sensations which take one back to the past and bring before one's mind even the most distant infancy as a scene flooded by sunlight.

Lines 637-646

I have succeeded in attaining at least one end ; my mind has been refreshed, and if the pleasant mood in which I now find myself continues, I shall soon be able to continue my story through later years. I see my path clearly because it is a single theme of well-defined limits. At present I have chosen this theme in preference to a work of greater scope and variety in which I might feel perplexed and lost. Moreover, I have definite hopes that such a labour will be welcome to you, my honoured friend.

9

The Prelude—Book II

Thus far, O Friend ! have we, though leaving much
Unvisited, endeavoured to retrace
The simple ways in which my childhood walked ;
Those chiefly that first led me to the love
Of rivers, woods, and fields. The passion yet
Was in its birth, sustained as might befall
By nourishment that came unsought ; for still
From week to week, from month to month, we lived
A round of tumult. Duly were our games
Prolonged in summer till the daylight failed ;
No chair remained before the doors ; the bench
And threshold steps were empty ; fast asleep
The labourer, and the old man who had sate
A later lingerer ; yet the revelry
Continued and the loud uproar : at last,
When all the ground was dark, and twinkling stars
Edged the black clouds, home and to bed we went,
Feverish with weary joints and beating minds.
Ah ! is there one who ever has been young,
Nor needs a warning voice to tame the pride
Of intellect and virtue's self-esteem ?
One is there, though the wisest and the best
Of all mankind, who covets not at times
Union that cannot be ;—who would not give
If so he might, to duty and to truth
The eagerness of infantine desire ?

10

20

Lines 1-18

O friend (Coleridge), I have so far tried to describe the simple ways in which I passed my childhood, though there are many things in this story of my life that I had to leave out of account. I have recalled only the memories associated with my love of rivers, woods, and fields. At that time my passion for Nature was newly-risen, and it was nourished by my surroundings without any effort on my part. Our noisy routine of play continued from week to week and from month to month. In summer we continued our games till fading of daylight. There would be no chair left before the doors; the bench and threshold steps were empty, and the labourer and the old man who had kept awake later than other people were fast asleep. Yet our noise and revelry continued. At last, when the darkness of night had spread over the ground and the stars had begun to twinkle on the edges of the dark clouds, we went home and retired to bed, feeling feverish because of the fatigue and with our minds still excited.

Lines 19-46

Everyone, who has tasted the enjoyable experience of youth, needs the warning that he should not feel proud of his intellectual development and his self-regard based on an estimation of his own virtues. There is nobody, not even the wisest and the best, who does not at one time or another desire that impossible union—namely, the continuance of the spirit of youth in his years of maturity and responsibility,

A tranquillizing spirit presses now
 On my corporeal frame, so wide appears
 The vacancy between me and those days
 Which yet have such self-presence in my mind, 30
 That, musing on them, often do I seem
 Two consciousnesses, conscious of myself
 And of some other Being. A rude mass
 Of native rock, left midway in the square
 Of our small market village, was the goal
 Or centre of these sports ; and when, returned
 After long absence, thither I repaired,
 Gone was the old grey stone, and in its place
 A smart Assembly-room usurped the ground
 That had been ours. There let the fiddle scream, 40
 And be ye happy ! Yet, my Friends ! I know
 That more than one of you will think with me
 Of those soft starry nights, and that old Dame
 From whom the stone was named, who there had sate,
 And watched her table with its huckster's wares
 Assiduous, through the length of sixty years.

We ran a boisterous course ; the year span round
 With giddy motion. But the time approached
 That brought with it a regular desire
 For calmer pleasures, when the winning forms 50
 Of Nature were collaterally attached
 To every scheme of holiday delight
 And every boyish sport, less grateful else
 And languidly pursued.

When summer came,
 Our pastime was, on bright half-holidays,
 To sweep along the plain of Windermere
 With rival oars ; and the selected bourne
 Was now an Island musical with birds
 That sang and ceased not ; now a Sister Isle
 Beneath the oak's umbrageous covert, sown 60

My physical frame is now being acted upon by a soothing spirit ; there seems to be such a wide gap between my years of manhood and years of childhood which still survive in my mind that, meditating upon them, I often become conscious of the existence of not one person but two persons in me. A rough piece of rock, lying midway in the square of our small market village, was the scene of our boyhood sports. When I returned after a long absence, I went to that site but found that the old grey stone was gone and there was an elegant assembly-room which now occupied its place. Let the fiddle scream there and may the listeners be happy. Yet, my friends, I know that more than one of you will think with me of those soft star-lit nights and the old woman after whom that stone was named and who used to sit there and watch her table on which were spread the articles which she used to hawk through all those sixty years.

Lines 47-54

We followed a noisy routine, and the year seemed to pass with giddy motion. And then came the time which brought with it a constant desire for calmer pleasures, when the beautiful objects of Nature were closely associated with every plan of holiday delight and every boyish game, which would otherwise have been less satisfying and pursued listlessly.

Lines 55-77

When summer came, it was our pastime to sweep on the plain water of the Windermere lake with rival oars on cheerful half-holidays. Sometimes the selected destination was an island where the melodious sound of the singing of birds was always heard ; sometimes it was a sister island which had the shady shelter of oak trees and was sown.....

With lilies of the valley like a field ;
 And now a third small Island, where survived
 In solitude the ruins of a shrine
 Once to Our Lady dedicate, and served
 Daily with chaunted rites. In such a race
 So ended, disappointment could be none,
 Uneasiness, or pain, or jealousy :
 We rested in the shade, all pleased alike,
 Conquered and conqueror. Thus the pride of strength,
 And the vain-glory of superior skill,
 Were tempered ; thus was gradually produced
 A quiet independence of the heart :
 And to my Friend who knows me I may add,
 Fearless of blame, that hence for future days
 Ensued a diffidence and modesty,
 And I was taught to feel, perhaps too much,
 The self-sufficing power of Solitude.

70

Our daily meals were frugal, Sabine fare !
 More than we wished we knew the blessing then
 Of vigorous hunger—hence corporeal strength
 Unsapped by delicate viands ; for, exclude
 A little weekly stipend, and we lived
 Through three divisions of the quartered year
 In penniless poverty. But now to school
 From the half-yearly holidays returned,
 We came with weightier purses, that sufficed
 To furnish treats more costly than the Dame
 Of the old grey stone, from her scant board, supplied.
 Hence rustic dinners on the cool green ground,
 Or in the woods, or by a river side
 Or shady fountain, while among the leaves
 Soft airs were stirring, and the mid-day sun
 Unfelt shone brightly round us in our joy.
 Nor is my aim neglected if I tell
 How sometimes, in the length of those half-years,
 We from our funds drew largely ;—proud to curb,
 And eager to spur on, the galloping steed ;

80

90

with lilies of the valley like a field. At other times the destination would be another small island where stood the ruins of a church once dedicated to Virgin Mary where devotional songs used to be sung every day. A race of this type where the goal was so pleasant never gave rise to any feelings of disappointment, uneasiness, pain or jealousy. We rested in the shade, all of us equally happy, the winners as well as the losers. In this way the conqueror's pride of strength and vanity of possessing a superior skill in rowing were moderated. Thus a quiet independence of the heart was gradually produced. I may add to this without fearing censure for the sake of my friend who knows me that from that ensued the diffidence and modesty which in my later years became a part of my nature. And I was taught to feel, perhaps to an excessive degree, the self-sufficing power of solitude.

Lines 78-93

Our daily meals were simple and rough like the food which Horace used to eat on his Sabine farm. Then we knew—more than what was pleasant—the blessing of a vigorous appetite; so our physical strength was not undermined by delicate food. For, except for the meagre weekly pocket allowance, we lived in absolute poverty during three quarters of the year. When we returned to the school from our homes after the half-yearly vacation, our purses were heavier; with the money brought from our homes we could afford to buy delicacies costlier than those which the old lady used to supply us from her meagre stock. So we could enjoy rustic meals on the cool green ground, or in the woods, or by a river side, or near a shady fountain, while mild breezes blew among the leaves of trees; and we were happily oblivious of the mid-day sun which shone brightly round us.

Lines 94-114

I will not be neglecting my purpose if I relate how sometimes during those half-years we used to draw heavily upon our funds. We were too proud to control and very eager to spur on our horses to a faster speed.....

And with the cautious inn-keeper, whose stud
 Supplied our want, we haply might employ
 Sly subterfuge, if the adventure's bound 100
 Were distant : some famed temple where of yore
 The Druids worshipped, or the antique walls
 Of that large abbey, where within the Vale
 Of Nightshade, to St. Mary's honour built,
 Stands yet a mouldering pile with fractured arch,
 Belfry, and images, and living trees ;
 A holy scene !—Along the smooth green turf
 Our horses grazed. To more than inland peace,
 Left by the west wind sweeping overhead
 From a tumultuous ocean, trees and towers 110
 In that sequestered valley may be seen,
 Both silent and both motionless alike ;
 Such the deep shelter that is there, and such
 The safeguard for repose and quietness.

Our steeds remounted and the summons given,
 With whip and spur we through the chauntry flew
 In uncouth race, and left the cross-legged knight,
 And the stone-abbot, and that single wren
 Which one day sang so sweetly in the nave
 Of the old church, that—though from recent showers 120
 The earth was comfortless, and, touched by faint
 Internal breezes, sobbings of the place
 And respirations, from the roofless walls
 The shuddering ivy dripped large drops—yet still
 So sweetly 'mid the gloom the invisible bird
 Sang to herself, that there I could have made
 My dwelling-place, and lived for ever there
 To hear such music. Through the walls we flew
 And down the valley, and, a circuit made
 In wantonness of heart, through rough and smooth 130
 We scampered homewards. Oh, ye rocks and streams,
 And that still spirit shed from evening air !
 Even in this joyous time I sometimes felt
 Your presence, when with slackened step we breathed

We might perhaps play tricks upon the cautious inn-keeper who used to supply horses to us in our need, if the place which we wanted to reach was far away. It might be some well-known temple where the Druids used to worship in ancient times, or the ancient walls of that large abbey where stood a church built in honour of St. Mary. The church was now in a state of ruin ; it had a broken arch, a bell-tower and statues. It stood in the midst of the trees, and presented a holy scene. Our horses grazed on the smooth surface of land matted with roots of grass. We experienced a feeling of peace in spite of the fact that the west wind swept above us from a stormy ocean. There were trees and towers in that secluded valley, both equally silent and motionless. Such was the deep shelter available to us there, and it offered both rest and quiet.

Lines 115-137

Then we mounted our horses once again, and the call was given for return. We rode at a high speed through the place of worship, using our whips and spurs and running a clumsy race. We rode past the statues of the knight and the abbot and the lonely wren which one day sang very sweetly in the nave of the old church. On that day the surroundings were rather uncomfortable because it had rained recently ; the earth was lightly touched by mild breezes and the place seemed to breathe and sob ; and large rain-drops fell from the trembling ivy which grew upon the roofless walls of the church. Even then the unseen bird sang so sweetly in that gloomy atmosphere that I felt like settling down there for ever so that I might always hear its sweet music. We rode swiftly through the walls and down the valley, and made a circuit in a playful mood. We rode homewards, going through rough and smooth. Oh, you hills and streams, and that calm spirit which descended from the evening air ! Even in that joyous time I sometimes felt your presence, when with the slowing of the horses we breathed

Along the sides of the steep hills, or when
 Lighted by gleams of moonlight from the sea
 We beat with thundering hoofs the level sand.

Midway on long Winander's eastern shore,
 Within the crescent of a pleasant bay,
 A tavern stood ; no homely-featured house, 140
 Primeval like its neighbouring cottages,
 But 't was a splendid place, the door beset
 With chaises, grooms, and liveries, and within
 Decanters, glasses, and the blood-red wine.
 In ancient times, or ere the Hall was built
 On the large island, had this dwelling been
 More worthy of a poet's love, a hut,
 Proud of its one bright fire and sycamore shade.
 But—though the rhymes were gone that once inscribed 150
 The threshold, and large golden characters,
 Spread o'er the spangled sign-board, had dislodged
 The old Lion and usurped his place, in slight
 And mockery of the rustic painter's hand—
 Yet, to this hour, the spot to me is dear
 With all its foolish pomp. The garden lay
 Upon a slope surmounted by the plain
 Of a small bowling-green ; beneath us stood
 A grove, with gleams of water through the trees
 And over the tree-tops ; nor did we want 160
 Refreshment, strawberries and mellow cream.
 There, while through half an afternoon we played
 On the smooth platform, whether skill prevailed
 Or happy blunder triumphed, bursts of glee
 Made all the mountains ring. But, ere night-fall,
 When in our pinnace we returned at leisure
 Over the shadowy lake, and to the beach,
 Of some small island steered our course with one
 The Minstrel of the Troop, and left him there,
 And rowed off gently, while he blew his flute
 Alone upon the rock—oh, then, the calm 170

along the sides of the steep hills, or when our horses galloped with thundering hoofs on the level sand lighted by moonbeams reflected by the sea.

Lines 138-174

Midway on the eastern bank of the long Winander there stood an inn within the crescent of a pleasant bay. It did not have an ancient air or a look of simplicity like the cottages which stood in its neighbourhood, but was an imposing building. On its doors could be seen carriages and their liveried attendants, and inside the inn one could see decanters and glasses with blood-red wine being poured into them. In ancient times, before the Hall was built on the large island, it must have been more worthy of a poet's love, a hut which was proud of its one bright fire and sycamore shade. The verses written over the gate of the tavern were no more visible. The figure of the lion had yielded place to beautifully drawn golden figures, as if to make fun of the village painter who had painted it. But the place with all its foolish ornamentation is still dear to me. The garden was situated on a slope surmounted by a plain of a small bowling-green. Below us there stood a grove, and through the trees and over the tree-tops we could have an indistinct view of the water. Nor was there any lack of refreshment like strawberries and rich cream. There, while through half an afternoon we played on the smooth platform, the shouts of joy made the mountains ring when any player won the game by his skill or by accident. But before night-fall, when we returned to our pinnace at leisure, rowing over the darkening lake, we directed our course towards the beach of some small island. We took the musician of the group to the island, left him there, and rowed away gently. He sat alone upon a rock and played upon his flute. At that time the prevailing quiet.....

And dead still water lay upon my mind
 Even with a weight of pleasure, and the sky,
 Never before so beautiful, sank down
 Into my heart, and held me like a dream !
 Thus were my sympathies enlarged, and thus
 Daily the common range of visible things
 Grew dear to me : already I began
 To love the sun ; a boy I loved the sun,
 Not as I since have loved him, as a pledge
 And surety of our earthly life, a light
 Which we behold and feel we are alive ;
 Nor for his bounty to so many worlds—
 But for this cause, that I had seen him lay
 His beauty on the morning hills, had seen
 The western mountain touch his setting orb,
 In many a thoughtless hour, when, from excess
 Of happiness, my blood appeared to flow
 For its own pleasure, and I breathed with joy.
 And, from like feelings, humble though intense.
 To patriotic and domestic love
 Analogous, the moon to me was dear ;
 For I would dream away my purposes,
 Standing to gaze upon her while she hung
 Midway between the hills as if she knew
 No other region, but belonged to thee,
 Yea, appertained by a peculiar right
 To thee and thy grey huts, thou one dear Vale !

180

190

Those incidental charms which first attached
 My heart to rural objects, day by day
 Grew weaker, and I hasten on to tell
 How Nature, intervenient till this time
 And secondary, now at length was sought
 For her own sake. But who shall parcel out
 His intellect by geometric rules,
 Split like a province into round and square ?
 Who knows the individual hour in which

200

and the motionless water seemed to lie upon mind though without any sense of burden. The sky looked more beautiful than ever before ; and I felt as if it had made its way into my heart and fascinated me like a dream.

Lines 175-197

In this way my sympathies went on widening, and the various objects that I saw every day grew dear to me. At the time I had already begun to love the sun. Then I did not love the sun as I do now—as a symbol of the security of human life on earth, as the light that makes us realize that we are alive, not because it sheds its generous light on many regions, but because I had seen it cover the hills with beauty in the morning, and had seen the western mountain in contact with it at the time of its setting in many thoughtless hours when because of an intensity of pleasure my blood flowed in my veins joyfully and I breathed with delight. Such feelings, humble but intense, led me to love the moon which I regarded with feelings of patriotic and domestic affection. For I would become oblivious of my purposes, standing to watch the moon when she seemed to be hanging midway between the hills. It seemed that the moon belonged to this valley only and knew of no other place to shine upon. It also seemed that the valley and its old cottages had a special right by which they could claim that the moon belonged to them alone.

Lines 198-232

At first I was attached to objects of Nature because of the incidental charms which they provided, but they vanished gradually. Now I hasten to relate how Nature which had held a secondary position till now was at last sought by me for her own sake. But the human intellect cannot be analyzed by the geometric rules which enable us to distinguish between a circle and a square. It is difficult for a man to say at what particular time

His habits were first sown, even as a seed ?
 Who that shall point as with a wand and say
 'This portion of the river of my mind
 Came from yon fountain' ? Thou, my Friend ! art one 210
 More deeply read in thy own thoughts ; to thee
 Science appears but what in truth she is,
 Not as our glory and our absolute boast,
 But as a succedaneum, and a prop
 To our infirmity. No officious slave
 Art thou of that false secondary power
 By which we multiply distinctions, then
 Deem that our puny boundaries are things
 That we perceive, and not that we have made.
 To thee, unblinded by these formal arts, 220
 The unity of all hath been revealed,
 And thou wilt doubt, with me less aptly skilled
 Than many are to range the faculties
 In scale and order, class the cabinet
 Of their sensations, and in voluble phrase
 Run through the history and birth of each
 As of a single independent thing.
 Hard task, vain hope, to analyse the mind,
 If each most obvious and particular thought,
 Not in a mystical and idle sense, 230
 But in the words of Reason deeply weighed,
 Hath no beginning.

Blest the infant Babe,
 (For with my best conjecture I would trace
 Our Being's earthly progress,) blest the Babe,
 Nursed in his Mother's arms, who sinks to sleep
 Rocked on his Mother's breast ; who with his soul
 Drinks in the feelings of his Mother's eye !
 For him, in one dear Presence, there exists
 A virtue which irradiates and exalts
 Objects through widest intercourse of sense ; 240
 No outcast he, bewildered and depressed :
 Along his infant veins are interfused

his habits first originated, like a seed that is sown. Nobody can point with a wand and say, "This part of the river of my mind came from that fountain". My friend, you are more deeply read in your own thoughts ; science appears to you what it is in reality. We boast of it as a glorious possession ; but you know that it is only a poor substitute for reality and strengthens our weak minds. You are no blind believer in that subsidiary faculty, by which we multiply distinctions, and then foolishly believe that our puny boundaries are things which we perceive as realities whereas they are the creations of our own reasoning faculty. You are not dazzled by these formal arts because the fundamental unity in things has been revealed to you. You will share my doubts although I am less aptly skilled to arrange the faculties in scale and order, classify into various categories the totality of the sensations, and in loud works recount the history and origin of each as of a single independent thing. It is a hard task, and in fact a futile hope, to analyze the mind, if each most obvious and particular thought has no beginning, when we speak of it in the words of reason deeply considered, let alone in a mystical and imaginative sense.

Lines 233-264

I shall have to depend mainly on my faculty for guesswork to trace man's earthy progress. The child is blessed as he is nursed in his mother's arms. He is rocked on his mother's breast and falls asleep. He imbibes the feelings apparent in his mother's eyes with his soul. The presence of the dear mother has a quality which irradiates and exalts all the objects which he perceives around him. The child does not feel like an outcast in the new world in which he finds himself, and he is not confused or depressed.

The gravitation and the filial bond
 Of Nature that connect him with the world.
 Is there a flower, to which he points with hand
 Too weak to gather it, already love
 Drawn from love's purest earthly fount for him
 Hath beautified that flower ; already shades
 Of pity cast from inward tenderness
 Do fall around him upon aught that bears
 Unsightly marks of violence or harm.
 Emphatically such a Being lives,
 Frail creature as he is, helpless as frail,
 An inmate of this active universe :
 For, feeling has to him imparted power
 That through the growing faculties of sense
 Doth like an agent of the one great Mind
 Create, creator and receiver both,
 Working but in alliance with the works
 Which it beholds.—Such, verily, is the first
 Poetic spirit of our human life,
 By uniform control of after years,
 In most, abated or suppressed ; in some,
 Through every change of growth and of decay,
 Pre-eminent till death:

250

260

From early days,
 Beginning not long after that first time
 In which, a Babe, by intercourse of touch
 I held mute dialogues with my Mother's heart,
 I have endeavoured to display the means
 Whereby this infant sensibility,
 Great birthright of our being, was in me
 Augmented and sustained. Yet is a path
 More difficult before me ; and I fear
 That in its broken windings we shall need
 The chamois' sinews, and the eagle's wing :
 For now a trouble came into my mind
 From unknown causes. I was left alone
 Seeking the visible world, nor knowing why.

270

It seems that the central attractive force of filial love which connects him with the rest of life works through his veins. If there is a flower to which he points with a hand which is too weak to gather it, it is the love drawn from the fountain of his mother's heart which has already made that flower beautiful in his eyes. Shades of pity cast from inner tenderness already fall around him upon everything that bears ugly marks of violence or harm. Such a creature lives a life full of vitality ; even though he may be weak and helpless, he is an inmate of this active world. For feeling has given him power that through the growing faculties of sense creates like an agent of God's mind. He his both creator and receiver ; he can work only in alliance with the works which he sees. Indeed, childhood is the first stage in the development of the poetic spirit in man. In most people this poetic spirit dwindles or is suppressed by uniform control of later years ; but in some people it remains strong through all the vicissitudes of life till the very time of death.

Lines 265-293

Beginning from the early days, soon after that first time when I had silent communication with my mother's heart through the sensations of touch, I have tried to display the means by which that infant sensibility which we receive as a gift at the time of our birth, was augmented and sustained in me. But a more difficult path now lies before me ; and I am afraid I would require the chamois' sinews and the eagle's wing in its rough turnings. At this stage I began to feel uneasy for certain mysterious reasons. I was left alone to seek the outer world, without knowing why I had to do so.

The props of my affections were removed,
 And yet the building stood, as if sustained 280
 By its own spirit ! All that I beheld
 Was dear, and hence to finer influxes
 The mind lay open to a more exact
 And close communion. Many are our joys
 In youth, but oh ! what happiness to live
 When every hour brings palpable access
 Of knowledge, when all knowledge is delight,
 And sorrow is not there ! The seasons came,
 And every season wheresoe'er I moved
 Unfolded transitory qualities, 290
 Which, but for this most watchful power of love,
 Had been neglected ; left a register
 Of permanent relations, else unknown.
 Hence life, and change, and beauty, solitude
 More active even than 'best society'—
 Society made sweet as solitude
 By silent inobtrusive sympathies,
 And gentle agitations of the mind
 From manifold distinctions, difference
 Perceived in things, where, to the unwatchful eye, 300
 No difference is, and hence, from the same source,
 Sublimed joy ; for I would walk alone,
 Under the quiet stars, and at that time
 Have felt whate'er there is of power in sound
 To breathe an elevated mood, by form
 Or image unprofaned ; and I would stand,
 If the night blackened with a coming storm,
 Beneath some rock, listening to notes that are
 The ghostly language of the ancient earth,
 Or make their dim abode in distant winds. 310
 Thence did I drink the visionary power ;
 And deem not profitless those fleeting moods
 Of shadowy exultation : not for this,
 That they are kindred to our purer mind
 And intellectual life ; but that the soul,

The props that had supported my earlier awareness of beauty ceased to interest me ; but the building stood without them, as if supported by its own spirit. All that I saw was dear to me ; and so my mind lay open to finer influences and to a more exact and intimate communion. Youth offers many pleasures to us ; but the greatest happiness perhaps is to receive more and more knowledge during that period of life when all knowledge is a source of delight untouched by any sorrow. When the seasons changed, every season seemed to reveal some transitory qualities which but for my vigilant power of love might have been lost to me. The seasons left a register of permanent relations which would otherwise have remained unknown.

Lines 294-322

I got life and change and beauty from them ; even solitude during this period of my life was more active than the best human company, and society was rendered as sweet as solitude by silent imperceptible sympathies and gentle agitations of the mind caused by many distinctions perceived in things in which the unwatchful eye sees sameness. And from the same source I derived sublimer joy for I used to walk alone under the silent starry sky and at that time I realized the power of sound to induce on exalted mood in man. These sounds were not spoilt by any sights. If the night grew dark on account of an approaching storm, I stood under a rock, listening to sounds that seemed to be the mysterious language of the ancient earth or sounds that seemed to dwell in distant winds. I derived a visionary power from them, and did not regard those passing moods of indefinable pleasure as useless. This was not because they were closely related to my purer mind and intellectual life, but because my soul,

Remembering how she felt, but what she felt
 Remembering not, retains an obscure sense
 Of possible sublimity, whereto
 With growing faculties she doth aspire,
 With faculties still growing, feeling still
 That whatsoever point they gain, they yet
 Have something to pursue.

320

And not alone,
 'Mid gloom and tumult, but no less 'mid fair
 And tranquil scenes, that universal power
 And fitness in the latent qualities
 And essences of things, by which the mind
 Is moved with feelings of delight, to me
 Came strengthened with a superadded soul,
 A virtue not its own. My morning walks
 Were early ;—oft before the hours of school
 I travelled round our little lake, five miles
 Of pleasant wandering.

330

Happy time ! more dear
 For this, that one was by my side, a Friend,
 Then passionately loved ; with heart how full
 Would he peruse these lines ! For many years
 Have since flowed in between us, and our minds
 Both silent to each other, at this time

We live as if those hours had never been.
 Nor seldom did I lift our cottage latch .

Far earlier, ere one smoke-wreath had risen
 From human dwelling, or the vernal thrush
 Was audible ; and sate among the woods
 Alone upon some jutting eminence,
 At the first gleam of dawn-light, when the Vale,
 Yet slumbering, lay in utter solitude.

340

How shall I seek the origin ? where find
 Faith in the marvellous things which then I felt ?
 Oft in these moments such a holy calm
 Would overspread my soul, that bodily eyes
 Were utterly forgotten, and what I saw
 Appeared like something in myself, a dream,

350

remembering its earlier experiences, retained a vague feeling of the existence of an ideal world to which it aspired more and more as my faculties matured. All the time I had a feeling that, no matter how much developed my faculties had been, and no matter how much my soul had gained, there was much more to which my mind could aspire.

Lines 323-352

It was not only amid dark and stormy scenes but also amid bright and peaceful scenes that the universal power of creative sensibility and the unity underlying all the diversities of Nature even in their subtler form, which stirred the mind with feelings of delight, came to me reinforced with a spiritual power, a quality which was not inherent in it. I used to enjoy walks in the early morning ; often before school-time I walked pleasantly for five miles around our little lake. It was a happy time, and it was more dear to me because there was by my side a friend whom I loved passionately at that time ; his heart would be filled with joy where he to read these lines. Many years have passed since we were separated, and we have not communicated with each other for a long time ; and we are living now as if those times and never existed. On many occasions I came out of our cottage before any fire had been lighted in any of the cottages in that locality, even before the thrush started singing songs to the woods in its shrill voice. I got up when the first rays of the dawn could be seen, and sat alone on some protruding rock when the valley yet slumbered and lay in utter loneliness. How shall I find the source ? Where shall I look to find the cause of faith in the marvellous things which I then felt ? I would often experience a holy calm overspreading my soul so that I would completely forget my physical eyes and what I saw seemed to be something that had been created by my own mind, a vision.....

Predman Lal Choudhary
M.A. (Pol. Sc. Eco. Lit. Hist.) B.Ed.
Motiyar Rainawari
SRINAGER-190003
JASHMIR

A prospect in the mind.

'T were long to tell
What spring and autumn, what the winter snows,
And what the summer shade, what day and night,
Evening and morning, sleep and waking, thought
From sources inexhaustible, poured forth

To feed the spirit of religious love
In which I walked with Nature. But let this
Be not forgotten, that I still retained
My first creative sensibility ;

360

That by the regular action of the world
My soul was unsubdued. A plastic power
Abode with me ; a forming hand, at times
Rebellious, acting in a devious mood ;
A local spirit of his own, at war
With general tendency, but, for the most,
Subservient strictly to external things
With which it communed. An auxiliar light
Came from my mind, which on the setting sun
Bestowed new splendour ; the melodious birds,
The fluttering breezes, fountains that ran on
Murmuring so sweetly in themselves, obeyed
A like dominion, and the midnight storm
Grew darker in the presence of my eye :
Hence my obeisance, my devotion hence,
And hence my transport,

370

Nor should this, perchance,
Pass unrecorded, that I still had loved
The exercise and produce of a toil,
Than analytic industry to me
More pleasing, and whose character I deem
Is more poetic as resembling more
Creative agency. The song would speak
Of that interminable building reared
By observation of affinities
In objects where no brotherhood exists
To passive minds. My seventeenth year was come

380

which had not yet assumed a tangible shape.

Lines 353-375

I would require a long time to relate how spring, autumn, winter snows, summer shade, day and night, evening and morning, sleep and waking thoughts poured forth influences to feed the spirit of religious love which I experienced as I walked in the midst of the scenes of Nature. But it must not be forgotten that I still retained the creative sensibility which I had experienced in my early years, and that the power of my soul was not in any way weakened by the daily routine of the world. I possessed a shaping power or forming hand which sometimes proved rebellious and acted at cross-purposes. It was like a local spirit which stood out against conventional behaviour but was most often strictly subordinate to the external objects with which it communed. A light flowed from my mind, and it lent the setting sun a splendour hitherto unknown to me. It exercised itself on all external objects—the singing birds, the gentle breezes and the running fountains. Even the storm at midnight acquired an additional threatening power as I watched it under the influence of this light. This light was responsible for the homage I paid to the objects of Nature, for the devotion that I felt towards them, and for the rapturous delight that I experienced in contact with them.

Lines 376-395

Perhaps, it should also be recorded that I still loved the exercise and the result of the labour which was more pleasing to me than the process of analytical reasoning. I regarded it as being more poetic in nature because it closely resembled the creative agency. The song would speak of that interminable building which was being raised by noting similarities in apparently dissimilar things—similarities which persons devoid of the creative sensibility did not see. I had now attained the age of seventeen ;.....

And, whether from this habit rooted now
 So deeply in my mind, or from excess
 In the great social principle of life
 Coercing all things into sympathy, 390
 To unorganic natures were transferred
 My own enjoyments ; or the power of truth
 Coming in revelation, did converse
 With things that really are ; I, at this time,
 Saw blessings spread around me like a sea.
 Thus while the days flew by, and years passed on,
 From Nature and her overflowing soul,
 I had received so much, that all my thoughts
 Were steeped in feeling ; I was only then
 Contented, when with bliss ineffable 400
 I felt the sentiment of Being spread
 O'er all that moves and all that seemeth still ;
 O'er all that, lost beyond the reach of thought
 And human knowledge, to the human eye
 Invisible, yet liveth to the heart ;
 O'er all that leaps and runs, and shouts and sings,
 Or beats the gladsome air ; o'er all that glides
 Beneath the wave, yea, in the wave itself,
 And mighty depth of waters. Wonder not
 If high the transport, great the joy I felt, 410
 Communing in this sort through earth and heaven
 With every form of creature, as it looked
 Towards the Uncreated with a countenance
 Of adoration, with an eye of love.
 One song they sang, and it was audible,
 Most audible, then, when the fleshy ear,
 O'ercome by humblest prelude of that strain,
 Forgot her functions, and slept undisturbed.

If this be error, and another faith
 Find easier access to the pious mind,
 Yet were I grossly destitute of all 420
 Those human sentiments that make this earth
 So dear, if I should fail with grateful voice

and, whether from this deeply-rooted habit of observing affinities among various objects or because of an excess of faith that all things were inter-related and inter-linked, my own enjoyments were transferred to inanimate things I came in contact with. Or the power of truth, coming in revelation, conversed with real objects. At this time of my life I felt that countless blessings surrounded me like a sea.

Lines 396-418

Thus, while the years passed, I had received so much from Nature that all my thoughts were saturated with feelings. At that time I was happy only when I felt the sentiment of Being spread over all things in the universe—all things that move and all things that are motionless ; over everything which, though inaccessible to human knowledge and thought and invisible to the human eye, is yet alive so far as the emotions are concerned ; over all the frisking creatures which indulge in merry-making ; over all the creatures which move slowly under the wave and even in the wave itself and in the depth of waters. No wonder then, if I felt the rapturous pleasures of my intercourse with every form of creature on the earth and in the sky, as it viewed the creator with looks of worship and of love. They all sang the self-same song which I heard most distinctly when my physical ear was overpowered by the humblest beginning of that music, forgot its functions and slumbered undisturbed.

Lines 419-451

It is quite possible that this belief may be wrong and that some other belief may be more acceptable to the pious mind. Even then I would be sadly devoid of all those human sentiments which make the earth so attractive, if I were to fail to acknowledge my indebtedness

To speak of you, ye mountains, and ye lakes
 And sounding cataracts, ye mists and winds
 That dwell among the hills where I was born.
 If in my youth I have been pure in heart,
 If, mingling with the world, I am content
 With my own modest pleasures, and have lived
 With God and Nature communing, removed 430
 From little enmities and low desires—
 The gift is yours ; if in these times of fear,
 This melancholy waste of hopes o'erthrown,
 If, 'mid indifference and apathy
 And wicked exultation, when good men
 On every side fall off, we know not how,
 To selfishness, disguised in gentle names
 Of peace and quiet and domestic love
 Yet mingled not unwillingly with sneers
 On visionary minds ; if, in this time 440
 Of dereliction and dismay, I yet
 Despair not of our nature, but retain
 A more than Roman confidence, a faith
 That fails not, in all sorrow my support,
 The blessing of my life—the gift is yours,
 Ye winds and sounding cataracts ! 'tis yours,
 Ye mountains ! thine, O Nature ! Thou hast fed
 My lofty speculations ; and in thee,
 For this uneasy heart of ours, I find
 A never-failing principle of joy 450
 And purest passion.

Thou, my Friend ! wert reared
 In the great city, 'mid far other scenes ;
 But we, by different roads, at length have gained
 The self-same bourne. And for this cause to thee
 I speak, unapprehensive of contempt,
 The insinuated scoff of coward tongues,
 And all that silent language which so oft
 In conversation between man and man
 Blots from the human countenance all trace

to you, O mountains, lakes, sounding cataracts, mists and winds that live among the hills where I was born. If I have been pure in heart in my youth, if, in spite of my contact with the world, I am still satisfied with my own humble pleasures, and have lived in contact with God and Nature, free from petty animosities and base desires, it is all due to your blessing. If in that time of fear which was a period of the disappointment of hopes, general indifference and neglect, a period when wicked men felt jubilant, and good men felt frustrated eventually became selfish and tried to disguise their selfishness under the soft names of peace and quite and domestic attachments, and expressed a contempt for visionary minds,—if in that time of ruin and dejection, I still retained a more than Roman confidence and an unfailing faith which proved to be a support to me in all sorrows and sustained me through all difficulties, that gift was also received from Nature, her winds, waterfalls and mountains. O Nature, you have fed my noble meditations. I find in you a source of unfailing joy and the purest passions to solace my uneasy heart.

Lines 452-471

My friend, you were brought up in the great city in the midst of far different scenes ; but you and I ultimately reached the same goal by different roads. It is because of this that I address myself to you ; and I do not feel daunted by other people's contempt for me, or by the indirect ridicule of cowardly fellows and all that unspoken language which so often in human conversation drives away all traces

Of beauty and of love. For thou hast sought
The truth in solitude, and, since the days
That gave thee liberty, full long desired,
To serve in Nature's temple, thou hast been
The most assiduous of her ministers ;
In many things my brother, chiefly here
In this our deep devotion.

460

Fare thee well !
Health and the quiet of a healthful mind
Attend thee ! seeking oft the haunts of men,
And yet more often living with thyself,
And for thyself, so haply shall thy days
Be many, and a blessing to mankind.

470

of beauty and love from the face. You have tried to seek the truth in solitude, and ever since the days which gave you freedom you have desired for a long time to worship Nature in her temple. You have been the most zealous of her devotees ; you are bound to me by many ties, but the principal bond between us is this deep devotion to Nature. Farewell ! Let sound health and the quiet of a healthy mind attend you. You seek the company of your fellow human beings, but more often you spend your time in solitude. I wish you a long life and hope that your life will be a blessing to mankind.

*Nature educated him by beauty and fear
awakening and disciplining his passions.*

10

Notes

BOOK I

Synopsis : "The poet, escaped from bondage sets out for a cottage where he means to start upon poetic work (1-45). His first efforts baffled, he reviews his resources and the possible subjects for a great poem, but sinks back into listlessness, daunted by the very greatness of his aspiration (46-269). To rouse himself he recalls the happy auguries of his childhood and Nature's early influence, and is thus diverted into writing a history of his own growth (269-300). As a school boy his sports led him into beautiful and solitary places, and his exploits were daring and dangerous. He visited by night the snares set for woodcocks (306-25); climbed precipices after the raven's nest (326-39); rowed out at night in a stolen boat (357-400); skated on the lake till after dark (425-63); went nutting, fishing or kite-flying. All this time Nature educated him 'by beauty and by fear', awakening and disciplining his passions, and 'peopling his mind with', 'forms sublime and fair' (301-2 : 340-56; 401-14; 464-75). Within doors they played humbler games, but were conscious of wild nature without, the pouring rain, the noises of splitting ice (499-543). Apart from the feelings for Nature that sprang directly from these outside activities ('extrinsic passions') there were others springing from within : joyful sense of oneness with Nature, pure pleasure in beauty, strange sensations of obscure memory (544-612). His story has begun far back and he finds it hard to leave the early years. He has chosen a single limited theme, 'the story of his life', he can now go forward with confidence, and the work will be welcome to Coleridge (612-46)."*

1-54. At the beginning of *The Prelude* Book VII, Wordsworth speaks of these opening lines as a 'glad preamble' poured out as he issued from city walls. The date and origin of these lines have been a puzzle to Wordsworthian scholars.

"There is no manuscript of them or of the following lines that is earlier than 1804, and it is now believed that the whole of this long passage at the beginning of the first book was not written down before 1803, although much of it must have been mentally composed long

*Helen Darbishire, *Prelude* (Oxford University Press, London), p. 51.

before. But Wordsworth's declaration that he uttered the opening lines

Even in the very words that I have here
Recorded,

on 'that day'—the day on which he felt the sense of release and freedom—cannot be entirely disregarded. The 'day' must have been one shortly after his departure from London, for the lines celebrate his release from the 'bondage' of life in 'the vast city', which can only be London, and his return to country life, at least for a time :

If not a settler on the soil, at least
To drink wild water and to pluck green herbs.

These words may perhaps indicate the temporary nature of his tenure of Racedown. The passage goes on to celebrate his hopes of being able at last to compose 'a work of glory'. At no other time in his life did Wordsworth quite a city after a long period of poetic inactivity, or as he calls it, after 'a long-continued frost'. Hence the attempts to date the experience much later, in 1799, and to make the little town of Goslar in Germany do duty for the 'vast city', fall to the ground. It may be objected that the lines in which he asks

What dwelling shall receive me ? In what Vale
Shall be my harbour ? Underneath what grove
Shall I take up my home ?

are unsuitable to the autumn of 1795, because he then already knew that he was going to live at Racedown. But this is surely to be too particular.

What he celebrated was a general sense of freedom from restraint, and of a return to congenial conditions of liberty and 'long months of ease and undisturbed delight' in Dorothy's company, in a house of his own, after the confinement and discomfort of Montagu's dismal chambers. It must be remembered too that financial as well as physical freedom was now beginning to be a reality. He had already received in August first instalment—only £5—of Raisley Calvert's legacy, with the promise of a more substantial one in the near future. £1250 was paid on September 25th, and a further £50 a month later. This must all have contributed to his new feeling of release.

We may conclude then that, one day while he was at Bristol, in August or September 1795, Wordsworth walked out into the open fields near the town and chanted aloud something akin to the opening lines of *The Prelude*. But there is more in them than an outburst in praise of liberty and hope. They contain also a description of the spirit of poetry—genius itself—at work within him.*

*Mary Moorman, *William Wordsworth—The Early Years : 1770-1803* (Oxford University Press/London, 1957), pp. 272-73.

1795 Charlotte
Prelude -

1. Oh there is blessing in this gentle breeze : It is interesting to note that Wordsworth's imagination often conceives of the coming of creative energy to the soul as a breeze. Cf. I. 41-5, II. 245, VII. 2, and *Excursion*, IV. 600 : The breeze of nature stirring in his soul.

3. Doth seem half-conscious of the joy it brings : Here is Wordsworth's most characteristic conviction of the living and spiritual character of natural phenomena. "The experience", says Abercrombie, "is not simply of the poet's own awareness of receiving pleasure ; it is also of the breeze's awareness of giving pleasure".

6-7. escaped From the vast city : London, where Wordsworth had stayed from January to September 1795. It had been a time of great distress for him, and he was glad to accept the offer of two friends, John and Azariah Pinney, of the use of Racedown. He was staying with the Pinneys in Bristol.

8. now free : economically, that is, because of the legacy of £900 from Raisely Calvert.

14. The earth is all before me :- So Milton wrote of Adam and Eve :

The world was all before them, where to choose
Their place of rest, and Providence their guide.

Paradise Lost, XII. 646.

But whereas Adam and Eve had lost their Paradise, Wordsworth expected to find his. This is the first of many Miltonic echoes in the poem.

21-22. That burden...The heavy weight of many a weary day : Cf. *Tintern Abbey*, 37-41 :

that blessed mood,
In which the burthen of the mystery,
In which the heavy and weary weight
Of all this unintelligible world,
Is lightened.

Tintern Abbey was written on June 13, 1798, and the above lines must have owed something of their form to unconscious reminiscence of the 'preamble' which had lately been adopted for *The Prelude*.

46. O Friend : Coleridge, to whom the poem was addressed.

46-47. not used to make A present joy the matter of a song : In Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, 1800, Wordsworth says : "I have said that poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings : it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity : the emotion is contemplated till by a species of reaction the tranquillity gradually disappears, and an emotion, similar to that which was before the subject of contemplation, is gradually produced, and does itself actually exist in the mind. In this mood successful composition generally begins..." Most of the poems of Wordsworth are based on

incidents or experiences which came back to him in a haunting way from the past. We must take it then, that Wordsworth was doing an unusual thing in writing the 'preamble' out of the very mood and moment that inspired it.

55. **My own voice cheered me** : It was Wordsworth's life-long habit to compose verse out of doors and aloud. In *Prelude*, IV. 93-130, Wordsworth tells of the friendly dog who accompanied him on his verse-making rambles as a youth :

Whene'er he met
A passenger approaching, he would turn
To give me timely notice, and straightway,
Grateful for that admonishment, I *hushed*
My Voice.....

See also *The Poet's Epitaph* :

He murmurs near the running brooks
A music sweeter than their own.

59 ff. "Although *The Prelude* is an autobiographical poem, it is not a literal chronicle of events. Thus, whereas Wordsworth no doubt found this oak-grove near Bristol, on a September day and there dreamed of the future, it is difficult to identify the 'known Vale' of L. 72 with Racedown, where he was shortly going to live. Racedown stands on a hillside, not in a valley, and it was not then 'known' to him. Similarly, the journey referred to in LL. 150-7 is unlikely, as some have thought, to have been an actual journey of inspection to Racedown, for no such visit is recorded in the otherwise complete records of Joseph Gill, the caretaker there. It is more natural to associate the known 'Vale' with Grasmere, which he had loved since his early days at Hawkshead. In December 1799 he did undertake a journey 'through three days', from Durham to Grasmere. It is possible, therefore, that Wordsworth telescoped the two events when, in 1804, he pieced together these opening lines of *The Prelude*."—P.M. Yarkar

65. **'T was autumn** : Ernest de Selincourt observes : "This statement alone should have been enough to convince the early editors of Wordsworth that he is describing neither his departure from Goslar nor his journey to take up his abode at Grasmere. He left Goslar in February 1799, and settled at Dove Cottage, Grasmere, on December 20 of the same year."

77-78. **a higher power Than Fancy** : the Imagination. In the Preface to *Poems*, 1815, Wordsworth said : "Fancy does not require that the materials which she makes use of should be susceptible of change in their constitution from her touch". Thus, the 'fancied scene' in L. 76 is merely the 'known Vale' of L. 72 evoked by memory. But this gives way before the more dynamic, creative, and ultimately prophetic power of the Imagination.

85. **with a startling sound** : an instance of Wordsworth's

sensitiveness to sound. Both Wordsworth and Coleridge rebelled against the 'tyranny' of sight over the other senses.

96. **Aeolian visitations** : thoughts that come and go with the breeze as the Aeolian harp sounds when the wind passes over it. The Aeolian harp was a stringed instrument called after Aeolus, god of the winds, producing sounds when exposed to the wind. Thomson thus describes it :

Behoves no more,
But sidelong to the gently-waving wind
To lay the well-tuned instrument reclined ;
From which, with airy flying fingers light,
Beyond each mortal touch the most refined,
The god of winds drew sounds of deep delight :
Whence, with just cause, The Harp of Aeolus it hight.
Castle of Indolence, i. 40.

102-3. **the mellowing sun, that shed Mild influence** : an echo of Milton : *Paradise Lost*, VII. 375, where the Pleiades dance before the sun 'Shedding sweet influence'.

133-34. **present gifts Of humbler industry** : In the early months of 1798 Wordsworth was engaged on the character of the Wanderer (*Excursion* I), *The Cumberland Beggar*, and *The Discharged Soldier* (*Prelude* Book IV). A little later of wrote the simpler poems to be included in the *Lyrical Ballads*, and *Peter Bell*. The shorter poems written at this time are referred to as 'present gifts of humbler industry'.

136. **his unruly times** : periods of depression, such as that described in *Resolution and Independence*, 11. 22-8.

140-1. **the mother dove Sits brooding** : a Miltonic echo. Cf. *Paradise Lost*, l. 21 : Dove-like sat'st brooding on the vast abyss. See also *Resolution and Independence*, l. 5 : Over his own sweet voice the stock-dove broods. Wordsworth cited this line in the Preface to *Poems* (1815) as an example of the Imagination in poetry.

142-3. **goadings on That drive her as in trouble through the groves** : Cf. Wordsworth's description of himself in *Stanzas written in my pocket—copy of Thomson's Castle of Indolence* :

Oft could we see him driving full in view...
And his own mind did like a tempest strong
Come to him thus, and drove the weary Wight along.

150. **the vital soul** : the Imagination.

151. **general Truths** : perhaps more universal than the 'primary laws of our nature', referred to in the Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*. R.D. Havens suggests 'insight into philosophic truths'.

155. **Forms, images** : sense impressions ; the 'Ideas of reflection' stored in his mind.

161. **little band of yet remembered names** : outworn mythologies. In this connexion P.M. Yarker observes : "If abstract

ideas are to be represented in poetry they generally need to be objectified. Myth and allegory are the traditional means for this purpose ; but they tend to outlive their usefulness. The images remain, but the significance fades. In the eighteenth century the classical myths, though popular for rococo decoration, had lost their meaning. Thought in the Enlightenment was too rarefied to be represented by such simple fables. Attempts to adapt established mythology to modern ideas, such as that of Erasmus Darwin, who used the Rosicrucian machinery of Sylphs and Gnomes to explain chemical and organic processes, were apt to be ridiculous. The commonest device of eighteenth-century poetry was to dignify the abstract noun with a capital letter, and leave the reader to supply the details ; but no immediate impact is achieved this way, and all precision is lost. In Book I of *The Prelude* Wordsworth laments the absence of some 'little band of yet remembered names' upon whom he could call to sustain his theme. In *The World Is Too Much With Us* he regrets that Proteus and Triton belong to a 'creed outworn'."

166-220. Before Wordsworth chose a philosophical theme as the subject of his great poem, he had to say farewell to

That other hope, long mine, the hope to fill
The heroic trumpet with the Muse's breath.
Recluse, I.

In this passage he tells us that his ambition wavered between a romantic tale of chivalry (168-85) and an epic of sterner action (186-220). Note that the latter are tales of heroic battling in the cause of liberty : one and all would illustrate Wordsworth's great saying :

By the Soul
Only the Nations shall be great and free.
Sonnet, September, 1802.

168-9. some British theme by Milton left unsung : It is interesting to note that Wordsworth's first ambition is to emulate Milton. In the *Milton MS.* at Trinity, Cambridge, is a list of subjects for a projected epic, in which the history of Britain before the Conquest is divided into thirty-three heads. Cf. also the *Epitaphium Damonis*, in which Milton tells of his project for writing a poem on the subject of King Arthur. By the time he came to write his great poem, he had abandoned the idea of a romantic British theme for the deeper and more universal theme of *Paradise Lost*.

171-3. Within the groves of Chivalry, I pipe
To shepherd swains, or seated harp in hand,
Amid reposing knights by a river side

Spenser : *Faerie Queene*, Book VI. Notice how Wordsworth develops this passage later, giving it a definite moral turn of which, when he wrote in 1798, he was quite innocent.

175. *dire enchantments* : Cf. Milton, *Il Penseroso* :

And if ought els, great Bards beside
 In sage and solemn tunes have sung,
 Of Turneys and of Trophies hung ;
 Of Forests, and inchantments drear,
 Where more is meant than meets the ear.

185. *faithful loves* : Spenser ; Faerie Queene, I. i. 1 : Fierce
 warres and faithful loves shall moralize my song.

187-190. *How vanquished Mithridates northward passed,
 And, hidden in the cloud of years, became
 Odin, the Father of a race by whom
 Perished the Roman Empire :*

"To these themes Wordsworth was attracted by his reading of Plutarch and Gibbon. 'There were only two provinces of literature', says De Quincey (*Works*, ii. 288 *ed.* Masson) 'in which Wordsworth could be looked upon as decently well read—Poetry and Ancient History. Nor do I believe that he would much have lamented, on his own account, if all books had perished, excepting the entire body of English Poetry, and, perhaps, Plutarch's *Lives*...His business with Plutarch was not for purposes of research : he was satisfied with his fine moral effects.' This statement, like many of De Quincey's, is fantastically exaggerated, for Wordsworth was more widely read than is often supposed, but at least it points to two of his three favourite classes of reading. Of Mithridates (131-63 B.C.) he read in Plutarch's *Lives of Sulla and Pompey*. After his defeat by Pompey in 66 B.C. Mithridates marched into Colchis and thence to the Cimmerian Bosphorus, where he planned to pass round the west coasts of the Euxine, through the tribes of Sarmatians and Getae, and invade Italy from the north. The connexion of Odin with Mithridates was suggested, as Worsfold points out, by Gibbon (*Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, ch. x). 'It is supposed that Odin was the chief of a tribe of barbarians which dwelt on the banks of the lake Maeotis, till the fall of Mithridates and the arms of Pompey menaced the north with servitude : that Odin, yielding with indignant fury to a power which he was unable to resist, conducted his tribe from the frontiers of the Asiatic Sarmatia into Sweden, with the great design of forming, in that inaccessible retreat of freedom, a religion and a people which, in some remote age, might be subservient to his immortal revenge ; when his invincible Goths, armed with martial fanaticism, should issue in numerous swarms from the neighbourhood of the Polar circle, to chastise the oppressors of mankind.' Gibbon appends to this passage a note which, doubtless, suggested the theme to Wordsworth. 'This wonderful expedition of Odin, which, by deducing the enmity of the Goths and Romans from so memorable a cause, might supply the noble groundwork of an Epic poem, cannot safely be received as authentic history.'

The identification of Mithridates with Odin is probably Wordsworth's own contribution to the legend."*

191. **Sertorius** : "The famous Roman general, who joined Marius in resisting the party of the Nobles in the Civil War. In 83 B.C. he retired into Gaul, and then Spain, whence he was obliged to retreat into Mauretania. Here he fought two campaigns : he kept Metellus and Pompey at bay for many years, but was assassinated in 72 B.C. Plutarch tells the story of his hearing from some sailors of the 'fortunate islands', where the climate and weather were so fair and so wholesome that the barbarous inhabitants themselves believe that 'there are the Elysian fields, the abodes of blessed creatures, which Homer hath so much spoken of. Sertorius, hearing reports of these islands (upon a certain desire now to live quietly out of tyranny and warres), had straight a marvellous mind to go dwell there'. The legend is that the followers of Sertorius, after his death, in order to escape the tyranny of Rome, fled to the Canary Islands, called by the ancients the Fortunate Isles, which were in this way peopled. It was their heroic descendants, then, who fought so valiantly and tenaciously to keep out the invading Spaniards from Tencriffe in 1493 ; their final subjugation was due not to the valour of the Spaniards, but to a terrible pestilence which decimated them in 1494. Their race died out completely. The story is told by Alonso de Espinosa in *The Guanches of Tencriffe*, first published in Spanish, in 1594."—Helen Darbishire

206. **that one Frenchman**. Dominique de Gournes, who went to Florida in 1568 to avenge the massacre of the French by the Spaniards there. Wordsworth read his story in Hakluyt's *Voyages*.

212. **Gustavus** : Gustavus I (1496-1560) freed his country from the tyranny of Denmark. Dalecarlia, a mining district in the west midlands of Sweden, is called 'the cradle of Swedish civil and religious liberty'. Here Gustavus arranged and matured his schemes for the liberation of his country, and the district is full of mementoes of his life there, when he had often to assume the guise of a peasant or miner to escape capture by the Danes.

215. **Wallace** : "Samuel Daniel celebrated the great Scottish hero, William Wallace, in his *History of England* under the year 1300 : "Now for King Edward of England, he presently after his return, falls anew upon Scotland, which in his absence had beaten his officers and people almost out of the country, slain Sir Hugh Cressingham with 6,000 English : recovered many Castles and regained the Town of Berwick. And all by the animation and conduct of William Wallace a poor private Gentleman (though nobly descended) who seeing his country without a Head, and thereby without a Heart, assembles certain of as poor and desperate estate as himself, and leads them to attempt upon whatsoever advantages

*Ernest de Selincourt, *The Prelude* (Oxford University Press/London), pp. 248-49.

they could discover, to annoy the English...he afterwards comes to be the General Guardian of the whole Kingdom: Leads their Armies; effects those great Defeats upon the Enemy; and was in possibility to have absolutely redeemed his Country, from the subjection of England, had not some private Emulation amongst themselves, and the speedy coming of King Edward, with all his power prevented him. So much could the spirit of one brave man work, to set up a whole Nation upon their feet, that lay utterly cast down. And as well might he at that time have gotten the Dominion for himself...but that he held it more glory to preserve his Country, than to get a Crown, For which he hath his immortal honour."

232. **immortal verse** : Cf. Milton, *L' Allegro* : Married to immortal verse.

233. **the Orphean lyre** : Orpheus was honoured by the Greeks as an ancient mystical poet. He was the son of the Muse Calliope, and his lyre was given him by Apollo.

On it he made such music that savage beasts were tamed, trees bowed down, and all Nature was drawn to him in sympathy. He had equal power over the human heart. Wordsworth aims, like Orpheus, to descend to the 'underworld' (of man's heart) to return. Wordsworth was not referring to *The Prelude* ; but in his poem *To William Wordsworth*, 'Composed on the night after his recitation of a poem on the growth of an individual mind', Coleridge called it

An Orphic song indeed,
A song divine of high and passionate thoughts
To their own music chanted.

236. **mellower years will bring a riper mind** : Cf. *Ode on Intimations of Immortality*, l. 186 : In years that bring the philosophic mind.

266. **vain perplexity** : aware (ll. 146-57) that he possesses the qualities of a poet, and having reviewed possible themes, Wordsworth is discouraged by his inability to compose the 'philosophic song' towards which he aspires (l. 229). But from this mood emerges the theme of *The Prelude*—the growth of his own mind.

269. **Was it for this** : The division in this line marks the beginning of that part of the first book probably written in Goslar. The preceding lines, 46-269, probably belong to the autumn of 1799. R.D. Havens observes : "The ease and naturalness with which the introduction merges into the biography proper is the more remarkable in view of the interval that elapsed between the composition of the two parts".

270. **the fairest of all rivers** : the Derwent, which flows past the garden of house in Cockermouth where Wordsworth was born. Rising in the hills above Borrowdale the stream runs into Derwentwater and then Bassenthwaite and joins the Cocker just below Cockermouth Castle. Cf. *Sonnet to the Derwent* :

Among the mountains were we nursed, loved Stream !
 Thou near the eagle's nest—within brief sail
 I, of his bold wing floating on the gale,
 Where thy deep voice could lull me !

275. **holms** : water-meadows, from Old Norse *holms*. The word is common in place names—cf. Chapel-Holm on Windermere, and Lingholm on Derwentwater.

280. **dim earnest** : an echo of Coleridge's poem *Frost at Midnight*, a quotation from which appears hereabouts in 1805.

283. **those towers** : the ruins of Cockermouth Castle, built, on a mound above the river, soon after the Norman Conquest. In the Parliamentary Wars, Cockermouth Castle was garrisoned for the king, but was taken and dismantled by the Roundheads in 1648. "At the end of the garden of my father's house at Cockermouth was a high terrace that commanded a fine view of the river Derwent and Cockermouth Castle." (I.F. note to *The Sparrow's Nest*.)

295. **Skiddaw** : The great mountain which lies back north of Derwentwater and east of Bassenthwaite—one of those that impressed Lamb on his first visit to the Lakes,—'great floundering bears and monsters they seemed, all couchant and asleep'.

302. **Fostered alike by beauty and by fear** : What are the means by which Nature effects her discipline on the growing boy ? They are the occasions she provides for evoking the emotions of pleasure and fear. In associative psychology, beauty and fear are the necessary agents to promote virtue : beauty to inspire, fear to restrain. Wordsworth frequently adverted to the importance of fear in forming a character. He believed in the free exercise of childhood emotion—he thought that such lack of inhibition would allow the child its best opportunity for finding its own maturity. What he thinks of more 'rational' systems of education he tells us in *The Prelude*, Book V. His picture of the model child produced by a 'rational' system of education (Book V, 296-340) shows a tender, unselfish, dignified creature who never mixes in quarrels, and has been carefully guarded from fear :

And natural or supernatural fear,
 Unless it leap upon him in a dream,
 Touches him not.

In the three episodes that now follow, II. 309-25, 326-39 and 357-400, he exemplifies the moral influence of fear. Such incidents, remaining in the memory, enter the personality and influence subsequent thought and conduct.

"When we come across these lines :

And I grew up
 Foster'd alike by beauty and by fear.
 (I, 305-306)

we are unlikely to read them primarily as personal confession, as a summary of what Wordsworth took to be the two chief formative influences of his childhood. We all too easily imagine him thinking back on his early experiences—the theft of the little boat, the trips to the islands in Lake Windermere—and then deciding what qualities could best summarize the effects they had on him. But I should suggest that the thought process may have worked the other way around—the Wordsworth quite naturally assumed a dichotomy between conceptions of ‘beauty’ and ‘fear’, and that behind his use of these words there stands a whole century of discussion on the nature of the beautiful and the sublime.”*

304. **that beloved Vale** : the vale of Esthwaite. The little old town of Hawkshead stands near the head of the lake, Esthwaite Water, which lies between the larger lakes of Windermere and Coniston. Wordsworth with his brother Richard were sent to the Hawkshead Grammar School in 1779. They lodged in the village with an old dame, Ann Tyson. The ‘beloved vale’ of his school days later became his ‘chosen vale’. In the ‘beloved vale’ of his school years Wordsworth learned to live with the fact of his mother’s loss and to compensate for his loneliness by finding in solitude his intimate and affectionate relationship with Nature.

328-30.

though mean

Our object and inglorious, yet the end

Was not ignoble :

the unworthy purpose of their activities contrasted with the effect they had on him. An example of the poet’s belief in a benign influence which, if unhindered, will turn to good even actions whose motives are base.

340. **the immortal spirit** : Cf. ‘soul’ in l. 301. Here the poet follows the empiricist philosophers who regarded man’s ‘soul’ or ‘spirit’ as the aggregate of his earthly experience. The following lines amplify this view by stressing the reconciliation of opposites, producing equilibrium and calm.

355. **Severer interventions** : an early variant of this passage suggests that this sort of visitation is vouchsafed only when Nature ‘would frame a favoured Being’, such as Wordsworth ; ‘quiet Powers’ are enough for ordinary mortals.

357-400. This passage is justly famous for the power and immediacy with which the experience is transmitted. “The incident, as Wordsworth relates it, has the awful reality of a nightmare, and we cannot doubt that the experience had been an actual one. In the first version of the *Prelude* we find more circumstantial details : the incident took place during the holidays when he was staying, ‘a School-boy Traveller’, at the Inn at Patterdale, and the lake was Ullswater. It is all circumstantial ; but that is not the point.

* Herbert Lindenberger, *On Wordsworth’s Prelude* (Princeton/New Jersey, 1966), p. 23.

Wordsworth goes on to suggest the existence of a special fellowship between himself and Nature.*

Although based on the animistic beliefs of Wordsworth as a boy, the incident as at present related does not depend upon the idea that Nature is actually inhabited by Presences. The words 'as if' in l. 379 indicate an analogous, rather than an actual presence. The moral influence of external Nature is imparted through the Imagination, which is the immanence of the 'Wisdom and Spirit of the Universe' within the human mind. Without its agency the peak would have wanted menace and the incident been trivial.

401-63. These lines were included in *Poems*, 1815, under the title 'Influence of Natural Objects in Calling Forth and Strengthening the Imagination in Boyhood and Early Youth'. They had previously appeared *The Friend* in December 1809.

403-14. That givest to forms and images a breath

... ..
A grandeur in the beatings of the heart :

"Wordsworth's idea is that images which have excited feelings in us of love, joy, fear, wonder, move through our minds thenceforth like living things. It is of great moment what images are linked with our earliest and strongest feelings. If the images are great, beautiful, and mysterious, the feelings themselves will be purified and sanctified. He has just told how his first awful impression of powers greater than himself, more mysterious than the world he knew, came with the vision of that huge mountain-peak rising into the night sky; and he means us to believe that his terror was given some ennobling quality by the greatness of the dark, sublime image. We might illustrate further from Wordsworth's poetry the power of an image to set the seal upon an emotion. A child's earliest feeling of excited wonder at the sight of a rainbow remains through life a beautiful feeling, which grows in spiritual strength with every fresh return of the beautiful image.

My heart leaps up when I behold

A rainbow in the sky :

So was it when my life began ;

So is it now I am a man ;

So be it when I shall grow old,

Or let me die !

The Child is father of the Man ;

And I could wish my days to be

Bound each to each by natural piety."—Helen Darbishire

425-63. "Like the other passages which end in a visionary experience, this one begins in circumstances of great visual clarity; the season is 'frosty' and the cottage windows are 'visible for many

* Herbert Read, *Wordsworth* (Faber and Faber Limited/London, 1949), pp. 46-47.

a mile'. Characteristically, Wordsworth 'heeded not their summons' and this helps to underline his preference for 'natural' rather than 'domestic' intercourse. He is not yet alone—it was a happy time 'for all of us'—but he is nevertheless marked out from his fellows by his heightened organic and spiritual sensibility; *'for me, / It was a time of rapture!'*; the verse quickens to catch the mood of exhilaration. Not only are some things clearly visible even in the twilight gloom but the frosty air makes others audible with especial clarity: 'Clear and loud The village clock tolled six'. Again the quality of the verse shifts slightly, to accommodate the successive sounds: 'hissed', 'resounding horn', 'the pack loud chiming'; and to adjust itself to the swift animal vitality:

...I wheeled about,
Proud and exulting like an untired horse.

Like the horse, he, too, is 'shod with steel'. The long vowel-sound of 'wheeled' captures the arc of Wordsworth's turning movement and the repetition of sounds in *about/Proud* suggests the pause and plunge of the returning arc. The alliteration of the letter 's' imitates, in splendid onomatopoeia, the *sound* of skating, as surely as the repetition of the letter 'i' does its swift, clean *movement*:

...All shod with steel,
We hissed along the polished ice in games,

The hard, cold feeling suggested by the steel is sustained by a number of words which echo clear metallic sounds: 'chiming', 'smitten', 'rang', 'tinkled like iron'. The scene is one of noisy exuberance, like those we have looked at in Book II—'not a voice was idle'—but again there strikes across the scene a melancholy note, not this time an actual sound, unless this is the answering echo of the hills:

...while far distant hills
Into the tumult sent an alien sound
Of melancholy not unnoticed.

The hills are far distant; they represent something outside the small, happy world they enclose. Wordsworth is not unmindful of them but, as yet, their alien sound is something he has still to contend with, something outside the scope of his boyhood experience—the 'still, sad music of humanity'. Is it this which distinguishes him from the others? At any rate, he retires 'Not seldom from the uproar...Into a silent bay', as his poetic calling will later mark him off from his fellow men. By now the orange sky of evening has died away, withdrawing the colour from the scene and prefiguring the 'dreamless sleep' of the last line. Alone, Wordsworth pursues the image of a star which 'gleams' in startling actuality upon a 'glassy' plain to remind us that, whatever its metaphorical overtones, this was a real image of an actual star. Since, however, it is a reflection, it recedes, as he pursues it with the concentration and desire we have

noticed in the other episodes, so that a close identification of the boy, the star and the image is produced in the reader's mind."*

441-42. **The leafles trees, and every crag Tinkled like iron :** Soon after receiving from D. W. a letter containing this passage, Coleridge wrote to his wife (Jan. 14, 1799), "When very many are skating together the sounds and noises give an impulse to the icy trees, and the woods all round the lake tinkle." Much of this letter was afterwards adapted for an Essay in *The Friend*, December 1809.

447-63. "Here we see Wordsworth deliberately setting himself apart, and seeking solitude, as he was to do much more often when older. On one level, what he does and what he sees are perfectly ordinary ; the feeling of giddiness which he describes is common enough, and is felt by any child who spins round and round until it feels dizzy. The sense, after violent movement, that the earth is still going round and round is common, just as skating is a common pastime, available to everyone. It is the way in which Wordsworth describes it that shows what an important experience it was to him. It is the kind of experience that no other writer who ever lived must have felt it, but Wordsworth was the first for whom it had significance, for whom it had a permanent meaning. It remained awake in his imagination ; it was not one of those childish fancies that are soon forgotten.

It is hard to describe or to understand exactly what this experience did mean to him. On one level, he clearly sensed, even as a boy, the livingness of the world itself. To him the earth was not a dead cinder turning aimlessly in space, but a living, moving, feeling thing ; at some moments, as in the quiet moments after skating, he felt aware of this mysterious life as other, religious men are aware of the presence of God. To him, the sense of the turning earth was not a mere trick of unbalanced ear drums, but a revelation of some profound truth about the nature of life itself. There is a simple physical explanation, just as there is a simple physical explanation of the way in which the dark peak appeared to follow the stolen boat—and Wordsworth is not fool enough to think that the peak really followed the boat, or that he really felt the world turn on its axis. But the explanation is different from the meaning. He was convinced that these sensations *meant* something to him : they were messages, revelations, warnings. This is how Wordsworth differs from the other boys ; the other boys felt mere dizziness, but Wordsworth felt the turning world."**

459-60. **as if the earth had rolled
With visible motion her diurnal round :**

* W. Graham, *The Prelude* (Basil Blackwell/Oxford), pp. 80-81.

** Margaret Drabble, *Wordsworth* (Evans Brothers Ltd./London 1968), pp. 89-90.

Cf. the second stanza of *A slumber did my spirit seal* :

No motion has she now, no force ;
She neither hears nor sees ;
Rolled round in earth's diurnal course
With rocks and stones and trees.

464-74. In these lines Wordsworth moves on to an almost religious, exalted tone ; using language which is positively Biblical, he says :

Ye Presences of Nature in the sky
And on the earth ! Ye Visions of the hills !
And Souls of lonely places ! can I think
A vulgar hope was yours when ye employed
Such ministry...

and describes, in an enormously powerful image, how these presences made :

...the surface of the universal earth,
With triumph and delight, with hope, and fears,
Work like a sea.

"In other words, these mysterious sensations of his had singled him out, and set him apart from his friends in a 'hope' that he would become a poet ; these feelings of his as a child were the beginnings of his poetic power. He believed that these presences were something outside himself, not something in this own heart ; to him, the surface of the earth was seething with life and with emotion, just as he himself was. The earth was alive, and he was alive, and to him the boundaries between the two were not distinctly marked. We can explain his conviction by saying that he himself was so full of vitality that in his imagination he spread his sense of life over lifeless objects, or we can believe with him that the life and the power were truly there ; it does not really matter which way we look at it. The important thing is to grasp that for him every object in the outside world was full of an inner life—the cliffs, the lakes, the mountains all spoke to him."—Margaret Drabble

464. *Ye Presences of Nature* : An early draft speaks of the 'genii of the Springs' and 'familiar of the Lakes'. In the revision Wordsworth substituted abstractions for these definite beings of mythology and folklore, leaving the animistic reference as a suggestion only.

499. *Ye lowly cottages* : The poet boarded with Ann Tyson while he was at Hawkshead Grammar School. Her cottage was in Colthouse, a small village half a mile from the town.

509-13. *Noughts and Crosses*.

511. *With crosses and with cyphers scribbled o'er* : Cf. *Paradise Lost*, Book VIII. 83 : 'With centric and eccentric scribbled o'er', where Raphael envisages Man's future vain attempts to map the stars. Wordsworth begins the mock-heroic vein.

514-35. Wordsworth, who had committed much of Pope to memory could hardly fail, when he wrote this passage, to recall the famous game of Ombre in *The Rape of the Lock*.

522. **plebeian cards**: Wordsworth has borrowed this phrase from Pope's *The Rape of the Lock*, III. 54: Gained but one trump, and one plebeian card.

531. **Vulcan**: the god of fire, son of Jupiter and Hera. Once in a quarrel between his parents when Vulcan interceded for his mother, Jupiter kicked him down from Olympus. He is depicted lame and deformed.

536-37. **the frost Raged bitterly, with keen and silent tooth**: Cf. *As You Like It*, II. vii. 177: The tooth is not so keen.

539-43. It has been suggested that Wordsworth's own experience of the noise occasioned by the splitting ice was reinforced by recollection of Coleridge's vivid description in the *Ancient Mariner* II. 61-2:

It cracked and growled and roared and howled,
Like noises in a swound.

543. **the Bothnic Main**: the Gulf of Bothnia, in the north Baltic.

544. **Nor, sedulous as I have been to trace**: an echo of *Paradise Lost*, IX. 27: Not sedulous by nature to indite.

545. **extrinsic passion**: adventitious emotion, that is, the by-product of some other activity, such as skating. An early variant has 'collateral interest'.

551. **Those hallowed and pure motions of the sense**: Wordsworth, like other man of genius, retained in his memory the intense joy that came to him as a child through the avenues of his senses. Traherne writes in his *Centuries of Meditations* of 'those pure and virgin apprehensions which I had in my infancy': "The corn was orient and immortal wheat, which never should be reaped, nor was ever sown. I thought it had stood from everlasting to everlasting! The dust and stones of the street were as precious gold: the gates were at first the end of the world. The green trees when I first saw them through one of the gates transported and ravished me, their sweetness and unusual beauty made my heart to leap, and almost mad with ecstasy, they were such strange and wonderful things."

W. H. Hudson, the naturalist, insists that the senses in children are far acuter than in grown-up people, the sense of smell, for instance, 'which seems to diminish as we grow older...is nearly as keen in little children as in the inferior animals and, when they live with nature, contributes nearly as much to their pleasure as sight or hearing'. Of his own experience he writes: "I rejoiced in colours,

scents, sounds, in taste and touch : the blue of the sky, the verdure of the earth, the sparkle of sunlight on water, the taste of milk, of fruit, of honey, the smell of dry or moist soil, of wind and rain, of herbs and flowers; the feel of a blade of grass made me happy; and there were certain sounds and perfumes, and above all certain colours in flowers, and in the plumage and eggs of birds...which intoxicated me with delight."

553. **intellectual** : Here 'intellectual' means 'abstract', or 'ideal', as in Shelley's *Hymn to Intellectual Beauty*.

555. **those first-born affinities** :

Cf.

that universal power
And fitness in the latent qualities
And essences of things, by which the mind
Is moved by feelings of delight.

Prelude, Book II. 324-27.

It is interesting to note that the argument in this passage is the opposite of that in the *Ode : Intimations of Immortality*. As P. M. Yarker puts it: "There the infant's affinities with the Ideal world he has just quitted are gradually eroded by contact with the material world. Here, however, the 'Spirit of the Universe' is seen to exist in both spheres, the Ideal and the material. Thus, the child's affinities with the Ideal enable him to recognize its presence in the material, and so form a 'bond of union between life (on earth) and joy (in the Ideal sphere)'."

567-80. At the age of ten Wordsworth did not associate the scene with any earlier memory, nor was he conscious of a sense of peace; he simply enjoyed it. Cf. *Lines Written in Early Spring*. But contrast II. 241-8, where the Baby loves the flower because of its association with his mother.

572. **fancies such as these** : 1805 make clear that II. 570-1 are referred to. 'Fancies', 'because the image of the sea signalling the rise of the moon to the shepherd's hut is merely contingent and arbitrary, not organic.

584. **works along the blood** : Cf. *Tintern Abbey*, l. 28 : 'Felt in the blood, and felt along the heart', although the immediate application of the expression is different.

However, the vocabulary and sentiments of the succeeding lines are reminiscent of *Tintern Abbey*. Although the boy is unaware of them, 'collateral objects' impress themselves, on his memory and so become 'habitually dear' to him.

615. **Disowned by memory** : The poet hopes that his subsequent feelings have not falsified his early memories. Cf. the striking image of the memory in Book IV. 256-75.

616. **Planting my snowdrops among winter snows** : "The text of 1850 here follows D and not E, the copy sent to press.

Botanically the metaphor is inaccurate, for it implies, at least, that snowdrops are normally 'planted' in the spring, and its meaning is obscure. Garrod (p. 196) interprets it as referring to the time of year (winter) at which Wordsworth began the composition of *The Prelude*. But the poet seems to mean not 'I began my story early in the year'—a remark which would be pointless in this context, and would give to the word 'early' as applied to the second part of the sentence a meaning different from that which it bore in the first, but rather 'I started my story far back in the earliest period of my life, dealing with incidents of my babyhood of which, I admit, I have no distinct memories'. In the words 'ere the birth of spring planting' etc., he aims at expressing his misgivings at his attempt to go back to days 'disowned by memory'. In his last revision Wordsworth noticed the weakness of the metaphor, for he deleted it, and substituted in its place :

fancying flowers where none,
Not even the sweetest, do or can survive
For him at least whose dawning day they cheered.

There is no doubt that he wished this reading to stand in the final text, but unfortunately his editor did not accept the correction.”*

641-45. The first book thus ends with a reference to the epic theme that had been discussed in II. 124-269.

BOOK II

Synopsis : “He recalls the riotous pleasures of childhood when his love of Nature was in its birth (1-48). The time came when he sought calmer pleasures, always associated with Nature—boating expeditions on Windermere, rides on horseback to Furness Abbey and the sea (48-174) ; and he loved the beauty of Nature because it was bound up with pastimes and places dear to him (175-97). A still more vital change took place when he outgrew schoolboy pursuits, the outward links that bound him to Nature, and came to seek and love her for her own sake (198-203). But how define or analyse exactly the phases and causes of intellectual growth ? (203-32). Once more he traces back to the babe in its mother's arms the origin of his 'first poetic spirit', that power to feel which is also the power to create (232-72). Now he tries to describe the new phase when nothing stood between him and Nature (272-81) : a deeper joy and fuller sympathy ensued, and he became conscious of a new spiritual quality in his intercourse, whether in moods of mystical exultation, or calm dream-like ecstasy (281-352). This religious love for Nature did not make him a mere passive worshipper, his mind exerted creative and transforming power upon what he saw, his vision was

*Ernest de Selincourt, *The Prelude* (Oxford University Press/London), p. 253.

his own (352-76). And further, he was impelled to associate together things in which passive minds perceive no likeness, till at last, when he reached his seventeenth year, he attained a state of perfect happiness in the conscious feeling of one life flowing through the whole universe, linking all living things with God (376-418). He gives thanks to Nature for the purity and happiness of his youth and for the hope and faith that now support him through days of public disaster and despair (419-51). He greets Coleridge, city-bred, yet a worshipper of Nature also (451-end)."*

7. nourishment that came unsought : Cf. extrinsic passion', I. 545.

19-26. The poet regrets the lost eagerness of youth, which 'intellect and virtue' are powerless to replace. He longs for the 'Union that cannot be', the continuance of the spirit of youth into the responsibilities of later life. This was the mood of much of his poetry until he resumed writing the *Ode on Intimations of Immortality*, probably in 1804.

27. tranquillising spirit : not 'The years that bring the philosophic mind', but the tranquillity in which emotion is recollected.

33. some other Being : himself when young.

37-46. Wordsworth revisited Hawkshead in November 1799. Ann Tyson had died in 1796. She is not the 'Dame' referred to in I. 43.

48-54. A second stage in the development of his attitude towards Nature. Whereas the boy in Book I had not been consciously aware of his surroundings, he is now sufficiently aware to desire that Nature should be "collaterally attached" to his holiday schemes. But Nature is not yet his immediate concern.

56. To sweep along the plain of Windermere : Cf. *Excursion*, IX. 485-88 :

When on thy bosom, spacious Windermere !
A Youth, I practised this delightful art :
Tossed on the waves alone, or 'mid a crew
Of joyous comrades.

59-65. In the fourth edition of Wordsworth's *Guide to the Lakes* is the following note on the Islands of Windermere : "This Lake has seventeen islands. Among those that lie near the largest, formerly called 'Great Holm', may be noticed 'Lady Holm', so called from the Virgin who had formerly a Chapel or Oratory there. On the road from Kendal to the Ferry Boat, might lately, and perhaps may still be seen, the ruins of the Holy Cross ; a place where the pilgrims to this beautifully situated shrine must have been in the habit of offering up their devotions. To other of these islands are named from the Lily of the Valley, which grows there in profusion."

*Helen Darbishire, *The Prelude* (Oxford University Press/London), p. 59.

69-72. Wordsworth's dislike of the competitive spirit is reflected in his attitude to the college examinations at Cambridge. See III. 64-75.

78. **Sabine fare** : such simple food as Horace enjoyed on his Sabine farm.

82. **little weekly stipend** : paid by Ann Tyson, began at three pence and rose to six pence, as the boys grow older. Sums varying from 5s. 3d. to one guinea were paid to the boys at the close of some vacations. The half-yearly holidays came at Midsummer and Christmas, lasting approximately from 20 June to 4 August, and from 20 December to 20 January.

101-2. **temple where of yore The Druids worshipped** : the Lake District is rich in so-called Druidical monuments—stone circles and avenues. Wordsworth must mean the stone circle at Swinside above the lower Duddon not far from Broughton-in-Furness, which he refers to in *An Evening Walk*, 1793, l. 171, and again in the River Duddon, sonnet, 18. His note to the latter gives its exact locality : "The Druidical circle is about half a mile to the left of the road ascending Stone-side from the vale of Duddon : the country people call it 'Sunken Church'." The circle is still marked *Druidical Temple* on Bartholomew's half-inch map.

103. **that large Abbey** : Furness Abbey, twenty-one miles from Hawkshead. It stands, now in ruins, in a small hollow called the Vale of Deadly Nightshade. This great Norman church of St. Mary-in-Furness was begun in 1127.

108. **more than inland peace** : because of the contrast with the ocean wind sweeping overhead.

134. **presence** : This word often has numinous overtones for Wordsworth. Cf. I. 464.

137. **the level sand** : identified as the sands of the Estuary of Leven by the lines in *Prelude* X which refer to this particular schoolboy expedition. Vide *Prelude*, X. 514-15 and 595-603.

138. **long Winander** : Winandermere, now called Windermere. Gray writes : "The road for full five miles runs along the side of *Wynander-mere*, with delicious views across it, and almost from one end to the other : it is ten miles in length and at most a mile over, resembling the course of some vast and magnificent river." *Journal in the Lakes*.

140. **a tavern** : the White Lion at Bowness. Part of the Bowling-green is still extant. It was this bowling-green that the Jacobite and Wing, described in *Excursion*, VI. 405-521, 'filled with harmless strife' (*ib.* 466).

144. **the blood-red wine** : Cf. *Sir Patrick Spens*, l. 2.

145. **the Hall** : 'Mr Gordon Wordsworth informed me that the reference is to an imposing circular house built of stone about

1770 on what is usually called "Belle Isle". It is still standing.' (Havens, p. 314).

148. **one bright fire** : so MSS. 1850 has 'own bright fire'.

157. **a small bowling green** : Part of the Bowling-green is still extant.

168. **The Minstrel of the Troop** : Robert Greenwood, afterwards Senior Fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge.

175. 1805 begins a new passage here, which seems correct, for a new development in his sensibility is now discussed. He becomes aware of the beauties of Nature, although still in a 'thoughtless' way (l. 186). Cf. *Tintern Abbey*, l. 90. 'Thoughtless' differentiates the boy from the man of ll. 179-80 ; he was not yet aware of implications.

190-91. **To Patriotic and domestic love Analogous** : The poet loved the moon because it was part of his own world and life.

197. **thee and thy grey huts, thou one dear Vale** : the Vale of Esthwaite. The cottages of Hawkshead are roofed with grey Coniston slate.

198. **incidental charms** : Cf. I. 545, and II. 7. The beauties of Nature, hitherto the background to his activities, now become the principal object of his interest.

203-21. "Coleridge's influence is strong in this passage, which outlines a transcendental theory of knowledge. Just as attempts to 'parcel out' the mind, tracing a particular influence from cause to effect, are futile and misleading, so rational or scientific processes inevitably falsify reality. Reason is a prisoner of its own categories, and these impose 'boundaries' where none exist. Science is thus a 'sucedaneum', or substitute for true knowledge ; it fosters error. 'We murder to dissect' ; truth is a unity, to be apprehended only in the Imagination, the unifying function of which was the cardinal point of Coleridge's thought."*

210. **Thou, my Friend** : Coleridge's intense study of the workings of his own mind, recorded in his note-books, was the groundwork of much of his greatest philosophical writing.

214. **sucedaneum** : 'That which is put to serve for something else', a substitute. The poet perhaps means that if we had divine insight into truth we should not need Science : given our want, we do need it as a *sucedaneum*. Ernest de Selincourt observes : "The only other employment of this word in verse with which I am familiar is in Cowper's humorous *Lines to the Rev. William Bull* :

Oh for a succedaneum then
To accelerate a creeping pen !

* P.M. Yarker, *The Prelude* (Routledge & Kegan Paul/London, 1968), p. 76.

In Cowper's line the word is more suited to its context than it is here."

222. **less aptly skilled** : Wordsworth acknowledges without apology his unsystematic habit of thought.

228-32. In these lines the poet distinguishes between the rational and the imaginative aspects of the mind. There are many references in Wordsworth's poetry to the 'mystical and idle' state, the condition of 'wise passiveness' in which the mind is most apt for imaginative response. The active, or reasoning, state of mind is hostile to the imagination. The argument of this passage is that, since it is impossible to analyze even the rational side of the mind, it doubly vain to employ such a method with the whole.

228. **Hard task** : So Raphael speaks of his difficulty in relating the 'invisible exploits of warring spirits' as 'sad task and hard'. P.L. v. 564.

232-51. P.M. Yarker observes : "In this passage Wordsworth moves away from the Hartleian arguments that had predominated in Book I towards the idea of 'creative sensibility', so named in l. 360. He writes of the baby not only as the first stage of 'our Being's earthly progress' but also as the simplest example of the unifying power of the Imagination. The baby's creative act is to unify the separate attributes by which it knows its mother (arms, breast, eye) into 'one dear Presence'. Affection for the mother then carries the process further into its environment, it by imagination with the things it sees.

In l. 241 Wordsworth rejects the Platonic view of the soul's reluctance to enter the body. The child is at home in the world because of the 'filial bond', an expression which implies both love of its mother and, through her, affinity with its environment."

243. **The gravitation and the filial bond** : Cf. *Spectator*, No. 571 : "Every particle of matter is actuated by this Almighty Being which passes through it. The heavens and the earth, the stars and planets, move and gravitate by virtue of this great principle within them."

254. **this active universe** : in 1805 the word *active* is italicized, stressing disagreement with the empiricist view of an inert and mechanical universe.

255-60. 1805 reads :

his mind
Even as an agent of the one great mind,
Creates.....

The universe is the continuous product of the living Mind : it is, as it were, what God imagines. Man's mind, connected in its creative faculty with the Mind of God, receives from the senses evidence of the nature of reality, and unifies this into its own concept of reality.

260-65. "Coleridge divided the Imagination into two, primary and secondary, where the function of the primary is perception, and of the secondary, art. Wordsworth, however, rejected this division, and saw perception and poetry as degrees of the same process. Thus, the baby's first awareness of his surroundings is the first act of the 'Poetic spirit'. In time, however, imagination may wither, so that, although the power of perception remains, that of poetry (except for some in whom it remains 'Pre-eminent') disappears. To Wordsworth poetry could be 'silent'; it was the vision that counted, not the expression."—P.M. Yarkar

276-81. "Wordsworth refers to the death of his parents, incidents actually six years apart, here rendered as one memory. In its context in Book II the passage is suggested no doubt by his having been talking about the crucial relationship of Mother and Babe as the type of human relatedness to the actual world and of the origin of the first poetic spirit. Only with considerable difficulty can it be shown how much the poetic sense remains preoccupied with that original relationship and that lost object of love, wonder, and power. Here I shall only suggest this connection between the objects of the 'visible world', in which one must continue to live, and the lost objects and relationships that constitute the awesome appeal of the 'invisible world', which is revealed momentarily by Imagination when the light of sense goes out.

Wordsworth's recollection of the child being 'left alone'—an aloneness that entailed 'seeking the visible world' and resisting the frightening inward pull towards an 'abyss of idealism'—must be related to his gradual realization of an even greater search beyond the ordinary consciousness of self."*

293. **permanent relations**: contrasting with the 'transitory qualities' in l. 290. His new awareness of Nature led him to perceive the changing beauties of the seasons, and his love for them left 'permanent relations' in his memory. 'Relations' thus means 'associations'.

295. '**best society**': Cf. *Paradise Lost*, IX. 249:

For solitude sometimes is best society.

304-5. In that darkness the 'tyranny of the sight' is withdrawn, and sound comes into its own.

309. For parallel animistic passages see I. 321-5, IV. 185-6.

310. **winds**: Cf. I. 1 & 337. Michael, in the poem of that name, 'had learned the meaning of all winds' (l. 48).

311-22. "When...Wordsworth speaks of the 'visionary power' that he 'drinks' while listening to 'the ghostly language of the ancient earth', he has been describing his youthful predilection for walking at night in storm and wind and pausing to stand in solitude. When he goes on to say that the soul.

* Richard J. Onorato, *The Character of the Poet—Wordsworth in The Prelude* (Princeton/New Jersey, 1971), p. 25.

Remembering how she left, but what she felt
 Remembering not, retains an obscure sense
 Of possible sublimity, to which
 With growing faculties still growing, feeling still
 That whatsoever point they gain, they still
 Have something to pursue,

he is writing of a state of being, the sense of which fuses growth and pursuit. Faculties shared by self and soul seem to take over from each other : what he is accounts for his being here, having this experience : what more he will be will be revealed or imagined in a spiritual journey that can be characterized only by the use of intensely felt metaphor. New points will be gained ; the pursuit will go on.”*

314. **purser mind** : The expression ‘purser mind’ is from *Tintern Abbey*, l. 29, a Hartleian reference which is here rejected (‘not for this’).

318. **possible sublimity** : The ‘possible sublimity’ is related to the Ideal world.

319-20. **With growing faculties she doth aspire,
 With faculties still growing :**

an imitation of one of the most characteristic features of Milton’s poetic style, a studied repetition of words or phrases, the repetition both emphasizing the idea and giving a peculiar musical effect.

320-22. These lines suggest that Nature cannot supply the ultimate needs of the soul.

322. **alone** : only.

325. **latent qualities** : Cf. ll. 321-2. Whatever the exultation that is derived from Nature, the feeling persists that there is more still to be experienced.

329. **virtue not its own** : i.e. ‘possible sublimity’.

330. **the hours of school** : “The daily work in Hawkshead School began—by Archbishop Sandy’s ordinance—at 6 a.m. in summer, and 7 a.m. in winter.”—**Knight**

333. **a Friend** : the late Rev. John Fleming of Rayrigg (note in 1850). Knight suggests that the friend was Rev. Charles Farish, author of *The Minstrels of Windermere* and *Black Agnes*, but he gives no authority for his suggestion.

343. **some jutting eminence** : “Knight has attempted to identify the eminence, but by the word ‘some’ Wordsworth implies that the same eminence was not chosen every morning. Hence the attempt to identify it is futile.”—**Ernest de Selincourt**

349-52. Of interest to this whole section of Book II is the I. F. note on the *Ode on Intimations of Immortality* : “I was often unable

* Richard. J. Onorato, *The Character of the Poet—Wordsworth in The Prelude* (Princeton/New Jersey, 1971), pp. 18-19.

to think of external things as having external existence, and I communed with all that I saw as something apart from, but inherent in, may immaterial nature.

Many times while going to school have I grasped at a wall or tree to recall myself from this abyss of idealism to reality. At that time I was afraid of such processes. In later periods of life I have deplored, as we all have reason to do, a subjugation of an opposite character, and rejoiced over the remembrances, as is expressed in the lines 'Obstinate questionings' etc. "To that dream-like vividness and splendour which invests objects of sight in childhood, everyone, I believe, if he would look back, could bear testimony." Cf. *Tintern Abbey*, describing to 'serene and blessed mood' in which

the breath of this corporeal frame,
And even the motion of our human blood
Almost suspended, we are laid asleep
In body, and become a living soul.

Cf. also Traherne, *My Spirit* :

An object, if it were before
My eye, was by Dame Nature's law,
Within my Soul...
...I could not tell
Whether the things did there
Themselves appear,
Which in my Spirit *truly* seemed to dwell ;
Or whether my conforming mind
Were not even all that therein shined.

361-62. **That by the regular action of the world
My soul was unsubdu'd :**

Wordsworth speaks in several places of the danger to the growing soul when the novelty and wonder of the world begins to wear off, and things are taken for granted. Cf. *Ode on Intimations of Immortality*, 130-2 :

Full soon thy Soul shall have her earthly freight,
And custom lie upon thee with a weight,
Heavy as frost, and deep almost as life !

362. **unsubdu'd** : Cf. ll. 263-5.

362. **plastic** : a Coleridgean term. See *Biographia Literaria*, Chap. X, where the word 'Esemplastic', 'to shaps into one', is defined.

376-81. In these lines Wordsworth's dislike of analytical thought is expressed.

386. **passive** : This word is used here in a pejorative sense, not in that of 'wise passiveness'. He means those who lack 'creative sensibility'.

391-418. These lines are in the nature of an extension of

ll. 350-2, a record of the poet's subjective attitude. But the emphasis here is on feeling; he was 'steeped in feeling', and this led him to transfer his own emotion to all he contacted. Cf. Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*: "I am sensible that my association must have sometimes been particular instead of general, and that, consequently, giving to things a false importance, sometimes from diseased impulses I may have written upon unworthy subjects."

409-14. 1805 reads :

Wonder not

If such my transports were ; for in all things now
I saw one life, and felt that it was joy.

Ernest de Selincourt observes : "Notice that the definitely Christian explanation of this 'joy' (i.e. ll. 412-14 in 1850) is among the latest additions to the poem—in MS. E."

The 1805 reading, with its echo of Coleridge's *The Eolian Harp*, l. 26 : 'O ! the one Life within us and abroad', is more in keeping with the rest of the passage.

416-18. **the fleshly ear,...Forgot her functions** : Cf. 'bodily eyes Were utterly forgotten', l. 349 above, and 'that serene and blessed mood' described in *Tintern Abbey*, when

the breath of this corporeal frame
And even the motion of our human blood
Almost suspended, we are laid asleep
In body, and become a living soul.

The trance-like experience in which the soul becomes fully alive has for Wordsworth this particular character : the senses are laid asleep, and the whole being is wrapped in blissful calm.

432-41. Legouis points out that these lines are based on a passage in a letter of Coleridge to Wordsworth in the summer of 1799 : "I wish you would write a poem, in blank verse, addressed to those, who, in consequence of the complete failure of the French Revolution, have thrown up all hopes of the amelioration of mankind, and are sinking into an almost epicurean selfishness, disguising the same under the soft titles of domestic attachment and contempt for visionary *philosophers*. It would do great good, and might form a part of *The Recluse*."

451-52. **Thou, my Friend ! wert reared In the great city : So** Coleridge himself wrote in *Frost at Midnight* :

I was reared
In the great city, pent 'mid cloisters dim

And so Charles Lamb describes Coleridge in *Christ's Hospital five and thirty years ago*. Lamb and Coleridge were schoolboys together at the Christ's Hospital in London.

11

Critical Estimate of the Poem

Introduction

The Prelude is the finest fruit of Wordsworth's great creative period. Wordsworth described this poem as a 'tributary' and also 'as a sort of portico to the Recluse, part of the same building'. The time taken to compose *The Prelude* straddled the writing of the Prospectus to *The Recluse*, and the completed work was conceived as an integral part of the overall structure whose 'design and scope' Wordsworth specified in that poetic manifesto. 'The Poem on the growth of your own mind', as Coleridge recalled the plan in 1815, 'was as the ground-plat and the Roots, out of which the Recluse was to have sprung up as the Tree'—two distinct works, but forming 'one complete whole'. The role of *The Prelude*, as the poet himself describes his grand design, is to recount the circumstances and mental growth of a 'transitory Being', culminating in his achievement of a 'Vision' and in the realization that his mission is to impart the vision in the public and enduring form of an unprecedented kind of poem :

Possessions have I that are solely mine,
Something within which yet is shared by none...
I would impart it, I would spread it wide,
Immortal in the world which is to come.

Origin of the Poem

The Prelude derived from the projected *Recluse*, from Coleridge's suggestion about the French Revolution, from Wordsworth's spontaneous poetry about his childhood, and, in its later two-thirds, from Wordsworth's rigorous self-inquisition. But once the poem got really going, it could not stop until, in the *annus mirabilis*, it caught up with Coleridge to whom it was addressed.

'It was in the early months of 1798 that Wordsworth conceived the idea of writing a history of the growth of his own mind. Partly on the suggestion of Coleridge, and spurred on by his enthusiastic encouragement, he had determined to compose a great philosophic poem to be entitled *The Recluse, or Views on Man, Nature and Society*. It seems probable that a rough draft of those lines, afterwards printed as the *Prospectus to Excursion* was struck off in the first heat of this resolve. He had already written *The Ruined Cottage*

and other verse which would naturally find its place in his comprehensive scheme; 'indeed', he wrote, 'I know not anything which will not come within the scope of my plan'. In the eager confidence with which he embarked on the enterprise he anticipated its completion in less than two years; but the 'paramount impulse not to be withstood' soon gave way to doubt. Has he the strength to assume so awful a burthen? Would it not be wiser to await those 'mellower years' that 'bring a ripier mind'? Are his misgivings justly founded, or are they mere timidity and laziness, a subtle form of selfishness cloaked in 'humility and modest awe'? The answer can only be found by taking stock of himself and examining how far Nature and Education have qualified him for his task. And so he wrote *The Prelude*. In the summer of 1798 he had little time to give to it, but during the following winter, when he was in Germany, he wrote many of those passages which describe the experiences of his boyhood, and it is probable that Books I and II were finished by the end of 1799. Then the poem was almost entirely laid aside till January 1804, when he began again in good earnest: it was completed in May 1805.*

Completed in 1805, Published in 1850 - Revisions & alterations

Wordsworth had finished one version of *The Prelude* in May 1805, but it was not published until after his death in 1850, and during the last forty-five years of his life he was continually altering, revising and adding to his original version. So the various texts of the poem cover a very long period in the poet's life, during which his style and his opinions both changed considerably. Fortunately, there are good records of the dates at which changes were made, so that anyone interested in unravelling the evolution of the poem can do so; usually, however, the earlier version is the better and the more interesting. Later changes remove some of the clumsiness of the 1805 text, but they also smooth out some of Wordsworth's most challenging and original ideas.

Title of the Poem *(The Poem to Coleridge)*

Wordsworth had chosen no title for his long poem: it was known to his family and friends as 'the poem to Coleridge', or 'the poem on his own early life'. Coleridge generally writes of it in his letters as *The Recluse*, but he refers to it in *The Friend* as 'an unpublished Poem on the Growth and Revolutions of an Individual Mind, by Wordsworth'. The title was given to it by Mary Wordsworth when it was prepared for publication in 1850 after Wordsworth's death. As Edwin Morgan puts it: "It is rightly named 'The Prelude', because it is the prelude to an unwritten poem; but in the business of preparing for that poem it has drained off so much life from the imaginary work still gestating in Wordsworth's mind that we have another case of the child being father of the man—even a child unborn."

*Ernest de Selincourt, *The Prelude* (O.U.P. London, 1956), pp. IX-X.

Praduman Kishan Dhar

M.A. (Pol. Sc. Eco. Eng. Hist.) B.Ed.

Motivar Rainawari

SRINAGER-190003

KASHMIR

Subject of the Poem

The Prelude deals with Wordsworth's own early life and childhood. It was all written after 1798, when the *Lyrical Ballads* came out, but it is about the years before 1798. So what we have is a thirty-year old man starting to write about himself as a boy and as a young man, writing during one of the most changeful patches of his own life.

"In *The Prelude* Wordsworth gives a record—and he will vouch for the truth of it—of that inner life out of which his poetry grew. He reveals a strange world, and the deeper we dive into it the stranger it becomes. It is the full intense life which he lived through his senses as a child and youth that he first tries to recapture and record; and the quality of that life makes it invaluable—this is the surprising thing—is its sheer unquestionable spirituality. Most of us are moved at times by some beautiful aspect of Nature, a radiant sunset, or a moonlit cloudy sky, to ask: What is the meaning of this sense that Nature gives me of a life beyond sense, this feeling of an extraordinary beauty and mysterious power? Is there an ultimate spiritual power, and have I a spirit that can unite with it? Wordsworth never asks the question. The eternal spirit was revealed to him through his senses, and his spirit was aware of it from the first. So he believed, looking back. The deepest layers of his experience are often exposed in roughly written drafts of passages afterwards abandoned, or much clarified and reduced, before he found a place for them in his text."

Autobiographical Interest of the Poem (autobiographical poem)

The Prelude is an autobiographical poem, but it is not Wordsworth's *Confessions*. It is what it professes to be, an account of the growth of a poet's mind. In it Wordsworth tells the story of his inner life from earliest childhood up to 1798, the year of the *Lyrical Ballads*. Events do not always follow each other in which they occurred, and the poem is shaped by a kind of internal logic of the growth of Wordsworth's mind rather than by the sequence of external events. Only intermittently does the narrative order coincide with the order of actual occurrence. As P.M. Yarker says, "The development is roughly chronological, but throughout the poem at significant points reference is made back to his childhood, contrasting later attitudes, or illustrating important aspects of his theme. Conversely, the adult Wordsworth is present even in Book I, drawing conclusions, and reflecting on the significance of his earliest experience." In *The Prelude* Wordsworth avoids the simply chronological arrangement of material in favour of one which would emphasize the essential importance of certain experiences and states of mind.

The Prelude is a novel and original undertaking in its examination and linking of the factors, both important and trivial, which go

*Helen Darbishire, *The Poet Wordsworth* (Oxford University Press/ London, 1950), pp 95-96.

Sale title "Growth of the Poet's mind"
Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantala Jammu
A unique spiritual autobiography =

CRITICAL ESTIMATE OF THE POEM

191

to make up a complex human personality. "He has an amazing gift for grasping the significance of the apparently insignificant, and for seeing all things as part of a meaningful whole; he tries to show us what he and his poetry are made of, and they are not made only of great events and emotions, of marriage and passion and the French Revolution, but of small things that a less observant or retentive mind would have forgotten—of boating expeditions, of chance meetings with old soldiers, of dreams, of the noise of the wind in the mountains, of the sight of the ash tree outside his bedroom window. These small, apparently disconnected events and impressions are to Wordsworth neither small nor disconnected. In *The Prelude* we see him tracing the links, joining them together, working out their meanings and what they have done to him. It is not surprising, in view of the complications and originality of this undertaking, that his drift is at times scarcely obvious, but even when we cannot quite follow his links, we feel that they are there, even if he has not quite managed to bring them up from the subconscious level into the light of day."*

In *The Prelude* Wordsworth has recognized his life around an event which he regards as the spiritual crisis not of himself only, but of his generation : that shattering of the inordinate hopes for mankind which the liberal European intellectuals had invested in the French Revolution. "*The Prelude*, correspondingly, is ordered in three stages. There is a process of mental development which, although at times suspended, remains a continuum; this process is violently broken by a crisis of apathy and despair; but the mind then recovers an integrity which, despite admitted losses, is represented as a level higher than the initial unity, in that the mature mind possesses powers, together with an added range, depth, and sensitivity of awareness, which are the products of the critical experiences it has undergone. The discovery of this fact resolves a central problem which has been implicit throughout *The Prelude*—the problem of how to justify the human experience of pain and loss and suffering: he is now able to recognize that his life is 'in the end/All gratulant if rightly understood'. (XIII, 384-5)."

((*The Prelude* is not a simple account of the poet's life.) Wordsworth never claims to have got his facts right, or his dates right, or to have told the whole truth. Its sub-title—"The Growth of a Poet's Mind"—shows that the poet was not interested merely in facts. It is a voyage of exploration, not a diary, not a source of information, but a self-examination. In it the poet has put into words the mysteriousness of the workings of the spirit. It is a unique spiritual autobiography.

Coleridge's Role in the Poem

The Prelude is Wordsworth's poem to Coleridge. 'The Poem

*Margaret Drabble, *Wordsworth* (Evans Brothers Limited/London, 1968), p. 82.

**M.H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism : Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* (W.W. Norton & Company, Inc/New York, 1971), p. 77.

to Coleridge' is no misnomer. Suppose someone who knew nothing of either Wordsworth or Coleridge were to read *The Prelude* for the first time. He would learn much not only about the Poet but about the Friend. In every single book, and scores of times in all, the Friend is addressed. Sometimes it is merely 'O Friend!', 'dear Friend', 'most beloved Friend', 'Dearest Friend', sometimes it is in passages of a few lines, sometimes in longer passages of which two run up to nearly a hundred lines. Twice only (VI, 287; XIII, 247) the name Coleridge is used—personal names are very rare in *The Prelude*. This deeply loved Friend can, because he knows the Poet (II, 74), be told bare truth as if in private talk (X, 372). There had been a difficult time when the Friend had helped to regulate the Poet's soul (X, 908), and now the Poet can call on the Friend, who is never absent from his thoughts, to give him strength for his task (III, 201). The Friend was country born but his schooldays, unlike the Poet's, had been passed in a city; yet by different roads the two had become worshippers of Nature (II, 466), and both had as children enjoyed much freedom (V, 233).

Both had been at Cambridge, the Friend later than the Poet, but in writing of Cambridge the Poet is writing of what the Friend remembers well (III, 314) and, though they were not contemporaries, the Poet is thinking always of his Friend's 'after sojourn in the self-same place' (VI, 298). The Friend had known unhappiness at Cambridge, but had been learned, eloquent and a deep student of philosophy (VI, 306). He was in ill health (VI, 329) and had therefore gone abroad (VI, 249; VII, 320), to Sicily where man is vile but the Friend can think of Timoleon and Theocritus, can visit Etna and search for the fountain Arethusa (X, 942-1039).

The Poet and the Friend have so much in common. There is the Poet's sister, true friend of both (VI, 215) and another Maid revered by both (VI, 239). There are memories of a summer on Quantock when they rejoiced in each other's poetry (XIII, 393). They have been together in the Lake country (IX, 397), enjoying not only Nature but discussion on the future of mankind: they have both known the Maid of Buttermere (VII, 328). When the Poet thinks of all that he would have lost if he had perished in the French Revolution, the climax is that he would have been 'even, beloved Friend! a soul To thee unknown' (X, 201). Part of his very theme, which has now become a history of 'the discipline And consummation of the Poet's mind' carried up to the point when he was capable of 'building up a work that should endure' (XIII, 278; i.e. to 1798 when *The Recluse* was begun), part of that very theme is the Friend himself, to whom one day a 'monument of glory will be raised' (XIII, 430)."^{*}

* H.M. Margoliouth, *Wordsworth and Coleridge 1795-1834* (Oxford University Press/London, 1953), pp. 136-38.

Epic Qualities of the Poem

"Epic poetry of the highest class," Wordsworth said, "requires in the first place an action.....with a grand or sublime train of consequences; it next requires the intervention and guidance of beings superior to man.....; and lastly,.....no subject but a religious one can answer the demand of the soul in the highest class of this species of poetry". If this passage from a letter to Southey is taken with certain passages in *The Prelude*, it is clear that Wordsworth believed that his poem fulfilled these conditions. In lines 146-271 of the first book, for example, when he is considering the possibility of 'an action with a grand or sublime train of consequences', we feel his close sense of kinship with Milton in his similar dilemma, and the many echoes from *Paradise Lost* throughout the poem confirm the impression. In lines 176-87 of the third book, the poet makes clear that, although the action of the poem is an internal one, it is no less worthy of heroic treatment on that account than are stories of military exploits and high adventure. The only difference is that, whereas such tales conceal the true meaning in myth, he proclaims it directly :

Not of outward things
Done visibly for other minds, words, signs,
Symbols or actions, but of my own heart
Have I been speaking...
This is, in truth, heroic argument.

(Book III, 176-87)

The Prelude has something of epic structure. It is laid out, not unlike an epic, with episodes, vicissitudes, and a climax, in thirteen books. Wordsworth obviously had classical models in mind when constructing *The Prelude*, but typically enough his poem has thirteen books, not the conventional twelve of *Paradise Lost* or the *Aeneid*. *The Prelude* differs from the traditional epic, too, in that it has no real story. It is not directly concerned with outward events, though they play their part; its action takes place not in the outside world but in the poet's mind.

"If modern readers are reluctant to award the laurels of epic poet to Wordsworth, it is not only that they are indifferent to the high claims of the genre, but perhaps also that *The Prelude* is deficient in that aspect of the 'epic spirit' which E.M.W. Tillyard, in his admirable book on *The English Epic*, calls the 'choric element' that we associate with epic: the feeling that 'behind the epic author is a big multitude of men of whose most serious convictions and dear habits he is the mouthpiece'.

If we are ready to grant *The Prelude* the other three epic qualities which Tillyard distinguishes—high seriousness, sustained exercise of the will, and even amplitude and breadth—we are hard put to think of *The Prelude*, for all its declamatory moments, as a

spokesman for its age: the egotistical sublime must by its every nature reject such demands.”*

Modernity of the Poem (*Though rooted in the past but the best great modern poem?*)

It is interesting to note that while *The Prelude* is a poem rooted in the past, a culmination of many traditions of thought and culture, it is at the same time the first great modern poem. In it Wordsworth is essentially concerned with human nature, with aspects of consciousness and being that are still relevant to our modern interests and predicaments.

The Prelude presents the poet in quest in his identity. It shows that Wordsworth is trying to seek a point of stability within himself. It is an attempt to establish a principle of continuity within change, to bridge

The vacancy between me and those days,
Which yet have such self-presence in my mind
That sometimes, when I think of them, I seem
Two consciousnesses, conscious of myself
And of some other being.

This theme has obsessed the modern imagination, replacing the quest of Everyman or of Bunyan's pilgrim. In so far as *The Prelude* is concerned with 'the growth of a poet's mind' it anticipates all those modern works which might be lumped together under the common title of 'A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man'.

The Prelude is a modern work in another sense; it is a self-reflexive poem. By this we mean a poem which has as part of its subject the writing of the poem itself. *The Prelude* is a poem which incorporates the discovery of its own *ars poetica*. It is surely the true ancestor of all those subsequent works of art which, so to speak, coil back upon themselves. The line includes *In Memoriam*, *The Wreck of the Deutschland*, *Four Quartets*, much of the poetry of Yeats and Wallace Stevens.

Both the beginning and the end of the double quest—the voyage of self-exploration and the effort to articulate experience—are perhaps those 'spots of time' which form the poetic peaks of *The Prelude* and of which the poet wrote so movingly:

So feeling comes in aid
Of feeling, and diversity of strength
Attends us, if but once we have been strong.
Oh! mystery of Man, from what a depth
Proceed thy honours! I am lost, but see
In simple childhood something of the base
On which thy greatness stands, but this I feel,
That from thyself it is that thou muist give.

* Herbert Lindenberger, *On Wordsworth's Prelude* (Princeton/New Jersey 1966), pp. 12-13.

Else never canst receive. The days gone by
 Come back upon me from the dawn almost
 Of life : the hiding-places of my power
 Seem open ; I approach, and then they close ;
 I see by glimpses now ; when age comes on,
 May scarcely see at all, and I would give
 While yet we may, as far as words can give,
 A substance and a life to what I feel :
 I would enshrine the spirit of the past
 For future restoration.

Again, we have only to recall Hopkins's concern with inscape, Joyce's concern with his epiphanies, Eliot's concern with his moments of reality, to see the modern relevance of *The Prelude*.

Recollected Emotion in the Poem

It is a well-known fact that Wordsworth's poetry took its origin 'from emotion recollected in tranquillity'. It was not, he tells us in the first book of *The Prelude*, his habit

...to make (*emotion recollected in tranquillity*)
A present joy the matter of a song.

"To Wordsworth, even unpleasant sensations could, as part of a later contemplation, give a kind of pleasure, particularly as part of the process of artistic creation : 'The emotion, of whatever kind, and in whatever degree, from various causes, is qualified by various pleasures so that in describing any passions whatsoever, which are voluntarily described, the mind will, upon the whole, be in a state of enjoyment'. (Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*). If this were not so, we may ask ourselves, how should we tolerate, a Satan, an Iago or the madness of a Lear ? But in *The Prelude* Wordsworth is thinking chiefly of the effect to memory in his own life and *The Prelude* itself is a deliberate cultivation of memories in order that they may become permanent :

—Unfading recollections ! at this hour
The heart is almost mine with which I felt.

That such recollections can bring solace is, of course, the theme of two well-known short poems, 'I wandered lonely as a cloud' and *The Solitary Reaper*. It was Wordsworth's experience that the pattern of these 'Rememberable things' was not clear at the time but that they passed unnoticed into the mind, where they were

...doomed to sleep
Until maturer seasons called them forth
To impregnate and not elevate the mind,
 (I, 594-6)

The idea is a difficult one to grasp, because Wordsworth seems to be saying that the matter is not as simple as remembering something happy when you happen to feel sad but that 'Felt in the blood and felt along the heart' (*Tintern Abbey*), these recollections enter and

inform the total personality of a man so that he becomes tranquil and has a balanced view of life, as well as an impulse towards something a little better than himself :

...the soul
Remember *how* she felt, but *what* she left
Remembering not, retains an obscure sense
Of possible sublimity, whereto
With growing faculties she doth aspire.
(II, 314-18)

That is why, in *The Prelude* and for the remainder of his days, Wordsworth was

...loth to quit
Those recollected hours that have the charm
Of visionary things, those lovely forms
And sweet sensations that throw back our life,
And almost make remotest infancy
A visible scene, on which the sun is shining.
(II, 630-35)**

Creative Vision in the Poem (*has glorified human mind*)

In *The Prelude* Wordsworth has glorified the human mind. He has learnt from his personal experiences that the human mind is capable of interpreting this universe in an increasingly meaningful way. We find the clearest statement of his views in Book XII :

This efficacious spirit chiefly lurks
Among those passages of life that give
Profoundest knowledge to what point, and how,
The mind is lord and master—outward sense
The obedient servant of her will.

The same idea occurs in the first two books of the poem.

There would seem to be three stages in the process by which the mystical relationship is brought about. In the first stage the poet begins to be aware of the creative activity of his mind as it operates on what it sees, though during this period the external images are still predominant :

... A plastic power
Abode within me ; a forming hand, at times
Rebellious, acting in a devious mood ;
A local spirit of his own, at war,
With general tendency, but, for the most,
Subservient strictly to external things
With which it communed.

The second stage appears to be one in which Wordsworth becomes conscious of images within his mind, as if they had passed, through his senses, from an outer to an inner existence :

* W. Graham, *The Prelude—Books I & II* (Basil Blackwell/Oxford, 1974), pp. 68-69.

In the second stage wordsworth became conscious of images within his mind.

CRITICAL ESTIMATE OF THE POEM

Oft in these moments such a holy calm
Would overspread my soul, that bodily eyes
Were utterly forgotten, and what I saw
Appeared like something in myself, a dream,
A prospect in the mind.

In the third stage, the life of the senses is entirely suspended, and he acquires a mystical 'power of joy' which enables him to see into everything

...that, lost beyond the reach of thought
And human knowledge, to the human eye
Invisible, yet liveth to the heart.

It is a condition of this deeper awareness that, ironically, those same physical senses which initiate it should have to be in abeyance. In the twelfth book of *The Prelude* Wordsworth calls the 'bodily' eyes 'The most despotic of the senses'. Sometimes the teeming images of his mind were almost an impediment to clear perception; yet, paradoxically, they were the masterlight of all his seeing.

Inner and Outer Reality in the Poem

"The artificial, the merely miraculous, the event which had no inner meaning, no matter how large externally it might be, I did not care for...Of more importance...was the birth of a habit of inner reference and a dislike to occupy myself with anything which did not in some way or other touch the soul." Thus William Hale White described the powerful effect which the reading of the *Lyrical Ballads*, which he had come across accidentally among a parcel of books, had had on him while he was in college. If he had not discovered the volume, he might well have experienced the same conversion a year or two later, in 1850, when *The Prelude* was published. For *The Prelude*, far more clearly than the *Lyrical Ballads*, maintains a contrast between those forms of experience which it dismisses as external and those others, inevitably more difficult to achieve and describe, which it dignifies with terms such as 'inner' and 'inward'.

(Struggle between inner and outer world)
In *The Prelude* we find a struggle between the two worlds, inner and outer, for primacy over its hero. "As such, one can read the poem almost like a morality play, with both forces alternately triumphing in the battle which rages within the poet."

The very structure of the spot of time, with its progress from publicly verifiable, external objects and events to a mysterious inward reality, seems designed to express this struggle. But the nature of this struggle is revealed even more conspicuously when we observe the sequence of the individual books of the poem, for each book concentrates primarily on but one of the two worlds. Thus, the first two, dealing with early childhood experience, concentrate on the inner world; the book on Cambridge shifts to the outer world and is, in turn, followed by Books IV-VI, which deal largely with

inward experience. The book on London shifts the reader back to external reality, while Book III, the 'Retrospect', attempts to summarise the who argument thus far, and attempts, in fact, to define a certain positive contribution made by the poet's outer experiences to his inward development. This book is followed by the two 'outer' books on the Revolution, which culminate in an inward struggle far more intense than any occasioned by his earlier external experiences, while the three final books celebrate his triumphant restoration to the inner world."*

Pathos and Ethos in the Poem

If we examine the three major philosophical poems of the Great Decade—*Tintern Abbey*, *Immortality Ode* and *The Prelude*—we can distinguish in each a transition from the realm of pathos to that of ethos. The progress from pathos to ethos is Wordsworth's image of the history of his own life. Thus, whenever he tries to summarize the course of his personal history (especially in Books VIII and XIII of *The Prelude*), he resorts to the vocabulary customarily associated with these terms. In the concluding book of *The Prelude*, for instance, he describes Dorothy's influence as a force that helped draw him from pathos to ethos :

Even to the very going out of youth,
The period which our Story now hath reach'd,
I too exclusively esteem'd that love,
And sought that beauty, which, as Milton sings,
Hath terror in it. Thou (Dorothy) didst soften down
This over-sterntness : but for thee, sweet Friend,
My soul, too reckless of mild grace, had been
Far longer what by Nature it was framed,
Longer retained its countenance severe,
A rock with torrents roaring, with the clouds
Familiar, and a favourite of the Stars...
When every day brought with it some new sense
Of exquisite regard for common things,
And all the earth was budding with these gifts
Of more refined humanity, thy breath,
Dear Sister, was a kind of gentler spring
That went before my steps.

It is interesting to note that the earlier Wordsworth is associated with 'terror', 'over-sterntness', 'recklessness', 'a rock with torrents roaring' and Dorothy with 'gentleness', 'more refined humanity' and 'common things'. The mature Wordsworth is, as it were, a synthesis of the two principles, with an emphasis on ethos.

"We might...think of *pathos* and *ethos* as a kind of language in and through which Wordsworth thought—a language which came

* Herbert Lindenberger, *On Wordsworth's Prelude* (Princeton/New Jersey, 1966), pp. 169-70.

to him so naturally that he could not have separated these concepts from the experiences and memories which they attempt to describe. It must, for example, have seemed natural to him to think of Dorothy as an incarnation of the qualities of ethos, or of his childhood experience plundering bird-nests as an instance of the workings of pathos. To the degree that he sensed a ready correspondence between his experience and such traditional concepts—and *The Prelude* reveals a high degree of correspondence—the demands of literary convention were able to consort well with the demands of sincerity.”*

Style of the Poem (*long poem in blank verse*)

The Prelude is a very long poem written in blank verse. It is interesting to examine Wordsworth's use of blank verse in this poem.

“If blank verse be not tumid and gorgeous, it is crippled prose”, Dr. Johnson wrote in the *Life of Somerville*, and amplified this in the *Life of Akenside* :

The exemption which blank verse affords from the necessity of closing the sense with the couplet betrays luxuriant and active minds into such self-indulgence, that they pile image upon image, ornament upon ornament, and are not easily persuaded to close the sense at all. Blank verse will, therefore, I fear be too often found in description exuberant, in argument loquacious, and in narration tiresome.

There is no denying that at his weakest Wordsworth's blank verse tends to 'crippled prose'. But at his best he combines mass and momentum, buoyancy and impetus, in such a way as to sail triumphantly through Johnson's Scylla and Charybdis.

The invocation to the ‘Wisdom and Spirit of the Universe’ in the first book of *The Prelude* provides a good example of exalted blank verse :

Wisdom and Spirit of the universe !
Thou soul that art the eternity of thought,
That givest to forms and images a breath
And everlasting motion, not in vain
By day or star-light thus from my first dawn
Of childhood didst thou intertwine for me
The passions that build up our human soul ;
Not with the mean and vulgar works of man,
But with high objects, with enduring things—
With life and nature—purifying thus
The elements of feeling and of thought,
And sanctifying, by such discipline,
Both pain and fear, until we recognize
A grandeur in the beatings of the heart.

*Herbert Lindenberger, *On Wordsworth's Prelude* (Princeton/New Jersey 1966), p. 39.

Now was this fellowship vouchsafed to me
With stinted kindness.

"One feature which clearly defines it is a negative one—it lacks both the characteristic Shakespearean quality of shifting metaphor (cf. Macbeth's 'Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow...' soliloquy) or the Miltonic one of the emphatic placing of key words, sometimes of opposite meaning (cf. any of Satan's speeches in *Paradise Lost*). With one exception—'dawn' (not very noticeable because of its association in the same line with 'day' and 'starlight', both used literally)—there is little obvious metaphor. 'Kindness' is an extension of the personification of the Spirit, as is, possibly, 'breath'; 'purifying' and 'sanctifying', while taken from a religious context, have here for Wordsworth an almost literal meaning. After the opening two lines, most of the others are 'run-on'; that is, the sense of the passage does not come to a halt at the end of each line but flows into the next without pause. This assists the feeling that the words are not deliberately placed but fall naturally into their right position without drawing attention to themselves. This in turn contributes to an impression of sincerity and conviction. The 'distortion' to which Wordsworth objected is here noticeable only in the form of the occasional inversion of subject and verb or the positioning of an adverbial phrase: 'not in vain...didst thou intertwine'; 'Mine was it'. The partial inversion 'was this... vouchsafed' follows idiomatically from the use of the conjunction 'Nor' in place of 'And...not'."*

The range of Wordsworth's expression can be judged, however, by the adjustment of this exalted tone manner to meet the needs of a more autobiographical passage like the following:

...In November days,
When vapours rolling down the valley made
A lonely scene more lonesome, among woods,
At noon an 'mid the calm of summer nights,
When, by the margin of the trembling lake,
Beneath the gloomy hills homeward I went
In solitude, such intercourse was mine;
Mine was it in the fields both day and night,
And by the waters, all the summer long.

As Graham puts it: "Here Wordsworth is trying to authenticate what he has just been saying by establishing occasions on which these general truths were made plain to him. The passage is subtly but intensively compounded of alliteration and onomatopoeic effects; one needs to be 'culpably particular' in order to discover them. First we may notice the drowsy, soporific effect of the repeated 'v' and 'm' sounds, alternating with the liquid sound of 'l' to produce a trance-like, lake-side experience: November, vaporous, rolling, valley, lonely, more, lonesome, all the summer long. Then there is

W. Graham, *The Prelude—Book I & II* (Basil Blackwell/Oxford, 1974), pp. 87-88.

the quiet, faintly mystical sensation produced by the long 'a' and 'o' vowel-sounds (contrast lines 439-42 which follow this passage); days, vapours, made, lake, day; November, rolling, lonely, lonesome, homeward, both; woods, noon, gloomy; and by the partial internal rhyme: November/trembling; calm/margin; gloomy/homeward. The interaction of these elements is very complex, as can be seen by the recurrence of most of the words under several headings. In the last resort, the magic is, quite rightly, beyond our analysis."

Our analysis of Wordsworthian blank verse has shown it to be apparently simple and austere but actually of a surprising richness beneath the surface. Wordsworth's blank verse in *The Prelude* combines buoyancy and impetus in a way appropriate to a long poem. It reflects the interchange between Mind and Nature, and provides a context in which moments of intensity may be related to the ordinary world.

To rob the Prelude of its images is to rob it of its whole plot & continuity.

Imagery in the Poem *its whole plot & continuity.*

"The distinctive thing about the images of *The Prelude*", says Lindenberger, "is that they provide the basic setting for the poem: water, islands, mountains, breezes, and growing things". Indeed, it is difficult to distinguish between the literal and metaphorical level in Wordsworth, for the literal becomes figurative and then literal again. So to rob *The Prelude* of its images is to rob it of its whole plot and continuity.

The dominating images of *The Prelude* are wind and water, images which by their very nature—their flowing, transforming quality, their power to interact with other natural elements, and also their traditional associations—allow Wordsworth free range between the observable world and the higher transcendental reality which he tries to make visible to us. The chief function of these images is to act as intermediaries between the two worlds. They also have a rhetorical function, for they serve to prepare the reader for the great moments of vision. In their gentler aspects the wind and water help bring together the divergent orders of Wordsworth's world, but in their harsher moments they serve yet another function—as manifestations of power and vitality in the universe.

The island is one of the great Romantic images. The image of the island appears frequently in *The Prelude*. Like the wind and the water, the island is part of the natural setting of Wordsworth's background, and, in consequence, of the poem itself. When we read a passage like the following, we hardly think of the island as a conscious symbol:

When summer came
It was the pastime of our afternoons
To beat along the plain of Windermere
With rival oars, and the selected bourn
Was now an Island musical with birds

Island is part of the natural setting, of woods and the background.

CC-0 Agamam Digital Preservation Foundation Chandigarh. Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

That sang for ever ; now a Sister Isle
 Beneath the oaks' umbrageous covert, sown
 With lilies of the valley, like a field ;
 And now a third small Island where remain'd
 An old stone Table, and a moulder'd Cave,
 A Hermit's history.

Here Wordsworth is far more the objective observer than the conscious symbolist. But it is interesting to note the order in which the islands are introduced : the first, joyous and paradise-like ; the next shaded and subdued, as though suited to the contemplative mood ; the last wholly dedicated to contemplation and solitude. In a poem like *The Prelude*, which constantly mediates between inner and outer worlds, emptiness becomes an image of transition, the vision itself a type of island. Wordsworth's designation of his visionary moments as 'spots of time' is, in fact, a geographical metaphor which suggests the island-like qualities of these moments.

There is still another image through which Wordsworth records intimations of the inner world. We become aware of it, for instance, each time we encounter such words as 'under-thirst', 'under-presence', and 'under-soul'. Behind these words there stands what David Perkins calls 'the image of the cavern or abyss'. Perkins discerns a double function for this image in Wordsworth : first, as symbolic of 'an inevitable, and fearful, isolation from any external medium through which the mind can be healthfully governed', and second, as suggestive of 'fertility and creation'. As Lindenberger says, "Unlike the wind, water, and mountains which dominate the poem's scenic background, the cavern functions chiefly as a metaphor, in fact, a literally submerged metaphor, one which we sense but dimly through the unnamed (and unnamable) depths and underagents which Wordsworth has such frequent occasion to invoke."

Kenneth MacLean, writing of the water image in *The Prelude* notes the following properties of water which Wordsworth chose to build from : "(Water) has the power to move and sound ; to freshen and make float ; to wash and to cleanse ; the power to reflect ; to distort, to sparkle magically ; the power to be free ; and finally, the power to create that rhythm, which, however if comes to life, can moderate, soothe, and give pleasure." One hardly need list the various potentialities that the poet found in breezes, mountains, islands, caves, and, above all, in the combination of these images. It is interesting to note that in those parts of *The Prelude* where Wordsworth did not have the natural landscape to work from, his imagery becomes conventional. Thus storm images in the passages on the French Revolution give dramatic colouring to the central situation, but they are always rhetorically, at least, distinguishable from the narrative which they are intended to embellish.

Conclusion

"The Prelude represents the height of Wordsworth's poetic achievement in one direction. It is a long poem, and a great poem, conveying high meditation on a basis of personal experience. It has a unity of design which depends upon the essential integrity of its subject. That subject is not 'My Life', but 'The Making of a Poet'. Its virtue lies in its power to express what Edward Irving, speaking of Wordsworth in one of his sermons, called 'the deep unfathomable secrecies of human thought'."* It justifies Wordsworth's claim to have demonstrated original genius, which he defined as 'the introduction of a new element into the intellectual universe' of which the 'infallible sign is the widening the sphere of human sensibility'.

① we come across words like "under-thrust", "under presence" and "under soul" -
 This poem conveys high meditations on the basis of personal experience -

*Helen Darbishire, *The Poet Wordsworth* (Oxford University Press/ London, 1950), p. 144.

12

Critical Opinions on the Poem

Wordsworth is a poet, a most original poet. He no more resembles Milton than Milton resembles Shakespeare—no more resembles Shakespeare than Shakespeare resembles Milton. He is himself and, I dare affirm that, he will hereafter be admitted as the first and greatest philosophical poet, the only man who has effected a complete and constant synthesis of thought and feeling and combined them with poetic forms, with the music of pleasurable passion, and with Imagination or the *Modifying* power in that highest sense of the word, in which I have ventured to oppose it to Fancy, or the *aggregating* power—in that sense in which it is a dim analogue of creation—not all that we can *believe*, but all that we can *conceive* of creation.—Wordsworth is a poet, and I feel myself a better poet, in knowing how to honour *him* than in all my own poetic compositions, all I have done or hope to do ; and I prophesy immortality to his 'Recluse' as the first and finest philosophical poem, if only it be (as it undoubtedly will be) a faithful transcript of his own most august and innocent life, of his own habitual feelings and modes of seeing and hearing.

—S. T. Coleridge

* * *

As it stands *The Prelude* has not merely a unity of design ; it has something of epic structure. It opens with an outburst of joy that after years of anxiety the poet is at last free to devote his life to its true vocation : its 'last word of personal concern' records his gratitude for the gift which brought him that freedom. Within this frame he places the history of his life from the seedtime of infancy to those days when chaunting alternate songs with Coleridge as they roamed the Quantock hill together, he was first fully conscious that his genius was bearing fruit. Books I-IV lead up, through an account of his early life, to the first great climax, his poetic consecration ; after which there is a pause in the narrative, whilst he reviews, in Book V, his early debt to literature. Books VI and VII resume his life's history, and carry it down to the moment before the second great climax—the awakening of his passionate interest in man (Book IX). But before this, the narrative pauses once more, whilst in Book VIII he gives a philosophic retrospect of his whole period of preparation. Book X leads up to and records the

catastrophe—the destruction of his hopes for man in so far as they were identified with the French Revolution, and his consequent despair of mind : Books XI-XIII give the reconciliation, his recovery from despair, the rebuilding of his hopes for man upon a sounder basis and, as a consequence, his entrance into his poetic heritage.

Wordsworth was in evident agreement with Milton on the true nature of the epic subject. Both of them repudiated military exploits, 'hitherto the only argument heroic deemed', in the desire to bring within its confines a more spiritual conflict. Only the pedant will dissent from their conception ; and those who regard the mind of Wordsworth as both great in itself and essentially representative of the highest, the imaginative type of mind, will recognize its adventures as a fit theme for epic treatment. But Wordsworth himself, though he claimed this dignity for *The Recluse*, where his theme was the 'mind of man', was humbler in his comments on *The Prelude*. He admitted, indeed, that 'it was a thing unprecedented in literary history that a man should talk so much about himself'. 'It is not self-conceit', he wrote truly, 'that has induced me to do this, but real humility. I began the work because I was unprepared to treat any more arduous subject, and diffident of my own powers. Here, at least, I hoped that to a certain degree I should be sure of succeeding, as I had nothing to do but describe what I had felt and thought ; therefore, could not easily be bewildered. This might certainly have been done in narrower compass by a man of more address ; but I have done my best. Yet, in truth, Wordsworth was never more eloquent than when he spoke of himself, and his best in *The Prelude* has never been rivalled in its own kind.

—Ernest de Selincourt

* * *

The Prelude is a spiritual autobiography, the most interesting in our language. It tells the story of the poet's inner life from earliest childhood up to 1798, the year of the *Lyrical Ballads*. The table of contents gives some idea of the perspective of the whole : Book I. Introduction—Childhood and School-time. II. School-time (continued). III. Residence at Cambridge. IV. Summer Vacation. V. Books. VI. Cambridge and the Alps. VII. Residence in London. VIII. Retrospect—Love of Nature Leading to Love of Man. IX and X. Residence in France. XI. France (concluded). XII. and XIII. Imagination and Taste, how impaired and restored. XIV. Conclusion. Book VII is central : its title, 'Love of Nature Leading to Love of man', gives the true subject of the poem. The three books recounting his experiences in France are essential to the dramatic story of his inner life, they tell of his ardent espousal of the Revolutionary doctrines, his faith in a new age dawning for man's his bitter disillusionment ; and the last books record his spiritual restoration through this very 'love of Nature Leading to Love of Man's'. But the first two books matter most of all. He set the highest value

upon the experiences of childhood : not only are those opening books wholly concerned with them, Book V returns to them and records his schoolboy reading, Book VIII takes up back in retrospect to his early years, and so does Book XII.

To Wordsworth a revelation came, as naturally as the air he breathed, with the first conscious moments of his childhood. What he later called 'the incumbent mystery of sense and soul' was then no mystery. He had but to be among the hills and lakes, to play and climb and skate, to witness the coming of night and day, the passing of the seasons—and the beauty, power, and majesty of life sank in through his senses to his spirit. No later experience had quite this purity and clarity. And this is way again and again in *The Prelude* he retraces his steps and calls back those early days, anxious to save each precious memory, each record of the mysterious sources of his visionary power :

Those shadowy recollections,
Which, be they what they may,
Are yet a fountain light of all our day,
Are yet a master light of all our seeing.

—Helen Darbishire

* * *

It is very difficult to tell the truth about one's self, not merely in the obvious sense that we are all apt to think well of ourselves, but in the less obvious sense that even when we are trying to scandalize the world with a picture of our utter heartlessness or immorality, we are all the while obeying an obscure impulse to ensure an inverse glory. It is often said that all fiction is disguised autobiography : it is just as true to say that all autobiography is disguised fiction. *The Prelude* is no exception ; it is the story of 'the growth of the poet's mind', and the poet is conceived, not merely as William Wordsworth, but as an ideal character progressing towards a state of blessedness in which he shall be fit to write that great philosophical poem conceived by Coleridge in the early years of their poetic faith. It is not Wordsworth's sincerity that is in question ; a great poem like *The Prelude* could never have been written without the deepest sense of sincerity. But sincerity is not truth ; it is only conviction—a state of belief directed towards some arbitrary end.

* * *

—Herbert Read

The so-called *Prelude* is no ante-chapel. It is a glorious cathedral, a poem not surpassed in imaginative psychology and in lyric fervour by anything of its kind in whole range of English poetry before or since, surpassed in grandeur by *Paradise Lost* alone. Like *Paradise Lost* and every poem of such length it has some flat passages. It has a few of Wordsworth's own special infelicities which are caused by his determination to speak 'the language of men', his only too

well justified revolt against 'poetic diction'. But when we refrain from judging by standards of absolute and unattainable perfection and take with joy and thankfulness what we are given, we find that we have (and Wordsworth did not know it!) the very poem 'On Man, on Nature, and on Human Life' at which he had been aiming. The structure is not the hopelessly ambitious and cumbersome one of world-history as suggested by Coleridge: it is that of a single life of twenty-eight years. Its subject is nothing less than the Mind of Man is illustrated by the growth of the individual mind the poet knew best, growth from childhood through world-shaking events, through abstruse study, through a continuing revelation of God within and behind Nature, through deep and tender human love for sister and for Friend. This is the cathedral which the architect knew not that he had built. Some parts of *The Excursion* added 'little cells, oratories, and sepulchral recesses, to it: some, parts of *The Excursion* are more like the buildings in the cathedral close, occupied by a kindly and dignified clergy not wholly adequate to the religion which produced the cathedral.

—H.M. Margoliouth

* * *

Time and place play almost as many tricks in *The Prelude*, particularly in the last four books, as in "Resolution and Independence" (which was based on a real meeting with a real leech-gatherer) or the poems about Matthew (a real schoolmaster, though at one or two removes) or even "Ruth" (which was suggested by an account of a real 'wanderer in Somersetshire'). *The Prelude* is only accidentally autobiography, and the factual matter it supplies must always be suspect unless confirmed from other sources. Essentially it is simply the longest and best of Wordsworth's 'poems of Memory' (to coin a category he never used himself).

—F. W. Bateson

* * *

He had to find out, from many kinds of description, from discursive reasoning, and from the analogies of tales and incidents, that anything he was to recreate through recollection must spring from the ground of the natural world, whether in itself a human emotion, an intellectual idea, or an article of faith; and he had to learn, up to the concluding book of *The Prelude*, how to infuse into his natural descriptions that absolute suggestive correspondence which makes them reveal and underscore the theme itself. He had to overcome the abstractness of his subject not by writing of abstractions in thick concrete imagery, as Shakespeare did, but by giving clear brilliant pictures separated from the intellectual content while imaginatively evoking it as something about to be told, this being necessitated by the recollectional method contemplating actual incidents in singleness.

The resulting work, although it is a poem, is a poem of a very

peculiar kind. It is rightly named 'The Prelude', because it is the prelude to an unwritten poem; but in the business of preparing for that poem it has drained off so much life from the imaginary work still gestating in Wordsworth's mind that we have another case of the child being father of the man—even a child unborn. *The Prelude* is not, therefore, completely unified in either intention or method. It is a record of the past; a creation of poetry out of the interaction of past and present; and a trial flight for imagined poetry of the future. Wordsworth's great victory came from his realization that these three processes had to find, and could find, a common meeting-ground.

—Edwin Morgan

* * *

The Prelude is at the centre of our experience of Wordsworth; at the centre of our experience of *The Prelude* are those 'spots of time' where Wordsworth is endeavouring to express key moments in the history of his imagination...

Narrowly speaking, the 'spots of time' are the two incidents introduced by Wordsworth's own use of the phrase: 'There are in our existence spots of time, / That with distinct pre-eminence retain / A renovating virtue', that is, the little boy's encounter with the gibbet and his wait for his father's horses.

Yet the poet's language implies that there were in fact many such 'spots' from which mind could draw new strength, and every reader of *The Prelude* will at once associate with these two those other 'passages of life' which collectively establish the greatness of the poem. Using the phrase in a looser sense, the 'spots of time' must include the descriptions of Wordsworth's boyhood exploits as a snarer of woodcocks, a plunderer of birds' nests, a skater, a rider of horses, and such single events as the famous Stolen Boat episode, the Dedication to poetry, the Discharged Soldier, the Dream of the Arab-Quixote, the memory of the Winander Boy, the Drowned Man, Entering London, the Father and Child and the Blind Beggar, Simplon Pass, The Night in Paris, Robespierre's Death, and Snowdon. Some would wish to include the memories of childhood play at Cocker-mouth, and the moment under the rock when Wordsworth heard 'The ghostly language of the ancient earth' (II, 309), or such border-line cases as the Druid Reverie. But a list incorporating every moment of excitement in *The Prelude* would be unwieldy and tendentious. The passages I have named everyone can agree upon: they must form the major items in any argument which seeks, in whatever terms, to express a sense of the poem.

—Jonathan Bishop

* * *

In the Preface to *The Excursion* (1814), Wordsworth wrote of *The Prelude*, then still unnamed and unpublished, and of *The Recluse* that 'the two works have the same relation to each other, if I may

so express myself, as the ante-chapel has to the body of a gothic church'. An architectural comparison is appropriate, but *The Prelude* seems to me to be rather more like a work of domestic than of ecclesiastical architecture. The first building was a well-proportioned structure of moderate size, varied yet congruous in its parts. But the owner, as often happens, came to think that it lacked some essential features for his satisfaction and decided to extend the edifice, changing its design and more than doubling its size. However, before this had been completed, no doubt encouraged in his extravagance by his wife and by his sister who had a great interest in these matters, he changed the plan again and, extending the building in several directions, he finally made it very much larger than he had ever envisaged. Visitors now-a-days to this massive and complex structure may sometimes lose their way in its connecting passages or stumble at some abrupt change of level in different parts, but the amateur student of this kind of architecture can enjoy a harmless pleasure in discovering how the whole edifice was put together. As often happens in building, some of the material used quite evidently antedates the earliest part of the triple structure. Some of it derived from a ruined cottage; some may be traced back to Tintern Abbey.

J.R. MacGillivray

* * *

He is, as John Stuart Mill remarked, 'the poet of unpoetical natures'. What he enacts in *The Prelude* is, after all, common experience raised to an uncommon power. 'Only connect', says Margaret Schlegel in *Howard's End*, 'only connect the prose and the passion and both will be exalted'.

It is an imperative we cannot but obey. Yet, of course, we are generally too timid, too lazy or too clumsy in our efforts to connect. Hence we find in great art a discipline and a consolation precisely because it builds more perfectly 'the rainbow bridge that should connect the prose in us with the passion'.

The Prelude is indeed just such a 'rainbow bridge'. It arches towards transcendental realities; it ranges through the many-coloured spectrum of human life and it is rooted firm in the rich soil of common experience.

W.J. Harvey

* * *

To understand what Wordsworth has achieved in *The Prelude*, we have only to read Coleridge's description, in his *Table Talk* for 21 July 1832, long after he himself had turned against Lock and Hartley, of the original plan of *The Recluse*.

The plan laid out, and, I believe, partly suggested by me, was that Wordsworth should assume the station of a man in mental repose, one whose principles were made up, and so prepared to deliver upon authority a system of philosophy. He was to treat man as man,—a

subject of eye, ear, touch, and taste, in contact with external nature, and informing the senses from the mind, and not compounding a mind out of the senses.

Aside from the fact that *The Prelude* portrays a mind in evolution not in repose, we precisely do not find there the doctrinaire anti-Lockean stand described by Coleridge.

Wordsworth no sooner tells us in *The Prelude*, Book I, how nature through 'extrinsic passion' or association first peopled his 'mind with forms sublime or fair', than he speaks of other pleasures

Which, if I err not, surely must belong
To those first-born affinities that fit
Our new existence to existing things,
And, in our dawn of being, constitute
The bond of union between life and joy. (554-8)

Note the tentativeness of 'if I err not', and how even innate affinities are traced back to a primitive origin which one may still understand to be natural. Such blending evokes 'the bond of union between life and joy' that is Wordsworth's answer to the question at the heart of *The Prelude*, the question that no simply rational account of life can answer. I mean the question, why live at all, why bother to get up in morning? As so often in Wordsworth's best lines, the answer is couched in words that are general, even vague. Yet the 'Presence' evoked, to use that other vague but potent Wordsworthian word, is definite enough and the only answer to the question, 'Why live?' We can infer that 'the bond of union between life and joy' is the thing that will always distinguish human beings from computers. We can also infer that the philosopher's question, 'Why live?' can only be answered by the poet. For the answer is that we take pleasure in the world we behold because are one with it. And it is only the poet who can make pleasure and oneness real for us by just such blending as Wordsworth employs.

Robert Langbaum

* * *

In form and structure, it is a peculiar and individual work. Like *Tintern Abbey*, it is in blank verse, and at times a very lofty blank verse; and like *Tintern Abbey*, it is addressed largely to one particular reader, this time not to his sister but to his greatest friend, Coleridge, with whom he had just produced the *Lyrical Ballads*. At times it resembles an epistle, or verse-letter, a form of poem popular in the eighteenth century, and much used by Pope. However, it is far longer than the usual epistle, and at times Wordsworth seems to forget Coleridge's existence entirely, and to write entirely for himself or for the general reader. In other ways it resembles an epic. It has noticeable similarities to the most famous of English epics. *Paradise Lost*; it has the same metre, the same dignity and seriousness, and even in places the same highly involved sentence

structure. And, like an epic, it is divided into Books. Wordsworth obviously had classical models in mind when constructing the poem, but typically enough his poem has thirteen Books, not the conventional twelve of *Paradise Lost* or the *Aeneid*. It differs from the true epic, too, in that it has no real story; an epic deals with actions, events, incidents, usually heroic or mythical and the so-called cinema epics of today, films like *Ben Hur* and *Lawrence of Arabia*, are perfectly faithful to the epic tradition in their subject matter at least, for like Homer and Milton they are concerned with heroes and battles, death and suffering.

The Prelude has no hero, and it is not directly concerned with outward events, though they play their part; its action takes place not in the outside world but in the poet's mind.

As a form, as a type of poem, *The Prelude* stands alone in English poetry. There is nothing quite like it. In some ways, particularly in its imaginative use of little details and incidents, outwardly trivial but inwardly full of meaning, it is more like a modern psychological novel than a poem.

Margaret Drabble

* * *

...*The Prelude* has a circular organization. This circularity of its form...reflects the circularity of its subject matter. In the opening passage of *The Prelude* the narrator is confirmed in his vocation as a poet-prophet and, in response to an impulse from the autumnal wood, chooses as his goal "a known Vale, whither my feet should turn", in the assurance "of some work of glory there forthwith to be begun". "Keen as a Truant or a Fugitive,/But as a Pilgrim resolute," and also (in a complementary pedestrian metaphor) "like a home-bound labourer" he then pursued his way until a three days' walk "brought me to my hermitage" (1850; I 71-80, 90-107). At the end of *The Prelude* Wordsworth, having taken up his "permanent abode" (XIII, 338) in this hermitage, calls "back to mind" the occasion of its beginning. But *The Prelude* has a complex function, for it is designed not only as a poem in itself, but also as a "portico" to *The Recluse*. The spiritual journey thus circles back at its conclusion to the literal journey with which it had originated; but this beginning at once turns over into the opening book of Wordsworth's "work of glory", *The Recluse* proper, which describes his way of life in the chosen vale. Only now does he identify the aspect of the vale which had all along made it goal of his tortuous literal, spiritual, and poetic journey. That goal, as in all the ancient genre of the circuitous pilgrimage, is home—*Home at Grasmere*.

M.H. Abrams

* * *

In our own time, although no responsible critic would hesitate to call *The Prelude* Wordsworth's masterpiece, our attitude toward

the poem has remained somewhat ambivalent. There is no longer, of course, any competition between *The Prelude* and *Excursion*, which, except for its great first book, has little more currency today than the eighteenth-century poem of the same name by David Mallet. Yet we are so unaccustomed to reading long meditative poems, and the traditional distinctions between a poet's major and minor poems have become so alien for us, that we tend to acclaim *The Prelude* for its "best parts" rather than the work as a whole. Josephine Miles, who has argued more persuasively than any other critic of our time in favour of Wordsworth's discursive poems, has shown how the poet's modern critics tend to rest their cases on shorter poems and passages, above all, those that exemplify "the fresh and natural particularity which he helped to foster and which has become the major poetic substance of our era". Though our critical canons have changed considerably since Matthew Arnold sought to establish Wordsworth's reputation on his short poems, we still prefer a short lyric to a longer poem, or a poem which disguises its larger pretensions with oblique statements, to one which, like *The Prelude*, does not hesitate to assert its meanings with full rhetorical force. Yet, as we move restlessly away from the conceptions of poetry established early in this century by Eliot, Pound and Yeats, the time may come when we accept *The Prelude* as the centre of Wordsworth's contribution to literature, with his shorter piece—the best of the sonnets, lyrics and short meditative poems—occupying that lower, but honourable position within his work that Milton would have reserved for "Lycidas", or Dante for his *Canzoni*.

Herbert Lindenberger

* * *

Even in his childhood, Wordsworth recalls; he 'felt gleams like the flashing of a shield'. But, though we can accept the 'mystical' implication, may be the most significant thing about Wordsworth's writing in *The Prelude* is the way he integrates the past and the present: and, not by way of nostalgia, as it might be 'mixing memory and desire', but positively, the past in the present for the future. The sheer writing of the first Book gives us the memories through the medium of a pondered and masterful poetic maturity. Ruminant and explication are interspersed among the experiences recalled, the poetic occasions themselves are presentations.

John F. Danby

* * *

The Prelude is unique as the product of a particular time. Wordsworth discovered a fresh and characteristic approach to the epic theme of Man and his environment which, once adopted, could never serve again. The poem belongs to the decade of Wordsworth's greatest vision. It is true that he continued to revise it almost until his death, and that these revisions resulted in technical improvement, so that, as de Selincourt said, 'no-one would doubt that the 1850 version is a better composition than the A-text'. Yet all Words-

worth's rewriting added nothing to the elements of the poem. If anything, the revisions occasionally weaken it by introducing the uncongenial sentiments of a later and more orthodox cast of mind. No one reads *The Prelude*, as once *The Excursion* was read, for intellectual or moral enlightenment. Its true quality is to be found in the compulsion with which Wordsworth here, as in other poems, brings his experience before the reader, so that the conclusions he draws seem part of the experience itself, and share its authority.

P.M. Yarker

* * *

The Prelude is the record of an attempt to live in accord with a high estimate of human worth. At the same time, it is a poetic attempt at curing the self of a specific trauma, and sheds light on what some have considered the general human trauma of self-consciousness. Inevitably, *The Prelude* is a poetic display of profound egoism, one increasingly qualified by the poet and finally renounced, but one that endures because the process it set above the person, as every sympathetic reader will attest. The personality of Wordsworth is intimately necessary, but subordinately so, to the account he wished to give of Imagination. What may be imagined in the sublime egoism of poetry confers a dignity on the mind attempting to imagine of itself something worthy of the power by which it is possessed. Despite Wordsworth's later Christian, resignation, this is a feeling one has about Wordsworth in relation to his art evoked by the peculiarity of his appropriate name.

Richard J. Onorato

Poet-Soos that nature
trained his mind -

13

Model Questions and Answers

The following questions are taken from M.A. (English) Question Papers of the Delhi and other universities. Those marked with asterisk are important.

Q. 1. On the basis of your reading of Books I and II of 'The Prelude' discuss the significance of the role assigned to nature in the formation of the poet's character. (Guru Nanak University, 1974)

Ans. In the first two books of The Prelude Wordsworth gives an account of his early life. 'The Child is father of the Man', he thought; and therefore it is a matter of great importance who educates the child, and how its early days are spent. The poet himself, looking back, sees that Nature trained his mind, and that he owes what he is in maturity to the natural free life he lived as a child among his native hills.

In the first book of *The Prelude* Wordsworth says that from his earliest childhood the influence of his environment has informed his character, giving him

A foretaste, a dim earnest, of the calm
That Nature breathes among the hills and groves.

The Derwent, 'fairest of all rivers', shared the process of his upbringing with his nurse, sending 'a voice/That flowed along my dreams'. As a child of five Wordsworth learnt to love the bright blue river flowing by the side of their terrace walk as a 'tempting playmate'. At Cockermouth, his birthplace, he

Made one long bathing of a summer's day;
Basked in the sun, and plunged and basked again
Alternate, all a summer's day, or scoured
The sandy fields, leaping through flowery groves
Of yellow ragwort; or when rock and hill,
The woods, and distant Skiddaw's lofty height,
Were bronzed with deepest radiance, stood alone
Beneath the sky, as if I had been born
On Indian plains, and from my mother's hut
Had run abroad in wantonness, to sport
A naked savage, in the thunder shower.

From these childhood recollections Wordsworth is led into writing an account of his boyhood life by way of the important lines which neatly epitomize the first two books of *The Prelude* :

Fair seed-time had my soul, and I grew up
Foster'd alike by beauty and by fear.

All the incidents of his boyhood days provoked one, or other, or both the emotions. There are two episodes in the second book in which Wordsworth's soul was fostered by beauty rather than by fear. The pattern of these two events is simple—a period of noisy, violent exercise is followed by a moment of intense peace. First there is vigorous movement :

Our steeds remounted and the summons given,
With whip and spur we through the chantry flew.
...through half an afternoon we played
On the smooth platform, whether skill prevailed
Or happy blunder triumphed, bursts of glee
Made all the mountains ring ;

then a sudden substitution of this communal revelry by an individual note :

...that single wren
Which one day sang so sweetly in the nave.
The Minstrel of the Troop.../Alone upon the rock.

The resulting emotion in each case is brought about by a melodious sound :

...I could have made
My dwelling-place and lived for ever there
To hear such music ;
...and left him there
And rowed off gently, while he blew his flute.

It produces a calm which

...sank down
Into my heart and held me like a dream.

There are three episodes in the first book in which Wordsworth's soul was fostered by fear rather than by beauty. Of these the stolen boat episode deserves particular mention. One summer evening the boy Wordsworth took a boat out without permission. He set a course by the 'summit of a craggy ride', and rowed towards it

...lustily
I dipped my oars into the silent lake,
And, as I rose upon the stroke, my boat
Went heaving through the water like a swan.

What follows is as unexpected to us as it was to the boy :

When from behind that craggy steep till then
The horizon's bound, a huge peak, black and huge,

As if with voluntary power instinct
Upreared its head.

It creates an alarm which persisted for many days and became an integral part of his personality, as the

...huge and mighty forms, that do not live
Like living men, moved slowly through the mind

and were a trouble to his dreams.

The emotions of beauty and fear aroused by these two types of incidents contributed to the development of Wordsworth's mind. Wordsworth shows clearly that through these emotions Nature excited his mind but she also disciplined it. Her gentle ministrations alternated with sterner ones.

Even the simple pleasures of Wordsworth's boyhood days contributed to the formation of his character. Simple games like nutting, fishing or kite-flying all exerted their influence. The 'milk-white clusters' of the hazel-nuts were the tokens of desire, the unsuccessful rod and line 'true symbol of hope's foolishness' the paper kite, 'suddenly/Dashed headlong', the emblem of elation and disappointment; all were anticipations of experience in the larger world and helped to prepare for that experience. Even the home amusements of the boy Wordsworth were associated with Nature. While playing indoor game "too humble to be named in verse", he was always aware of the power of Nature's 'keen and silent tooth' and of the protracted sound of 'Esthwaite's splitting fields of ice'.

In addition to this growing awareness of Nature resulting from external influences and impressions Wordsworth also felt within himself a sense of union with Nature.

In the second book he tells us how he learned to avoid the merely passive admiration of Nature and to replace it by an exercise of the modifying power of his own mind so that this creative act of transformation gave him a highly personal vision :

...An-auxiliar light
Came from my mind, which on the setting sun
Bestowed new splendour.

Thus he learned also to connect various types of experience which, 'to passive minds' remain 'disjointed, so that, by the time he attained the age of seventeen, he had reached a condition of supreme happiness in the awareness of the unity of all created life, animated by

...the sentiment of Being spread
O'er all that moves and all that seemeth still.

From the first two books of *The Prelude* we come to know that Nature played an important role in the formation of Wordsworth's character. In the final section of the second book the poet expresses

his gratitude to the forces of Nature for making him what he is. If, in times when the failure of the French Revolution is causing even good men to give up their hope for the betterment of mankind, he himself still retains strong faith in human nature, it is owing to these forces of Nature.

Q. 2. What does Wordsworth mean when he says in 'The Prelude' Book I that in his early life he was fostered by the two influences of beauty and fear?

Illustrate your answer by citing at least one example of each of the two influences.

Or

Both joy and fear played a part in the mental and spiritual growth of Wordsworth in the formative years of boyhood.

Discuss with reference to 'The Prelude' Book I and II.

(Kurukshetra University, 1974)

Ans. The formative period of a poet's life is always the period of chief interest; in the life of Wordsworth no other period presents any interest at all. The first two books of *The prelude* deal with the formative period of Wordsworth's life. It was during this period of his life that the poet received his education from Nature. At the very beginning of his account of himself, Wordsworth says:

Fair seed-time had my soul, and I grew up
Forster'd alike by beauty and by fear.

} = Beauty and fear -

Again and again he refers to the two influences which affected his early years most strongly—the influences of beauty and fear. Indeed, the elements of beauty and fear played a significant role in the poet's early life.

Among the hills and valleys of his native place Wordsworth led a healthy life of sport and adventure, driven by the goad that stirs young animal nature into wild activity. Behind and around the activities of his boyhood there was spread the solemn theatre of Nature. Nature taught him, through experience, three degrees of emotion: unmixed delight, troubled pleasure and pure fricht:

Whether her fearless visitings, or those
That came with soft alarm, like hurtless light
Opening the peaceful clouds; or she may use
Severer interventions.

In *The Prelude* Books I and II Wordsworth gives many illustrations of all three degrees of feeling.

Wordsworth describes many delightful experiences of his boyhood days in the first book of *The Prelude*. Thus, there was pure delight when he

Made one long bathing of a summer's day ;
 Basked in the sun, and plunged and basked again
 Alternate, all a summer's day, or scoured
 The sandy fields, leaping through flowery groves
 Of yellow ragwort ; or when rock and hill,
 The woods, and distant Skiddaw's lofty height,
 Were bronzed with deepest radiance, stood alone
 Beneath the sky, as if I had-been born
 On Indian plains, and from my mother's hut
 Had run abroad in wantonness, to sport
 A naked savage, in the thunder shower.

The most delightful experience described by Wordsworth in the first book is the game of skating in the company of his friends. Here is his description of an evening's skating, an evening of pleasure and beauty, not fear :

It is a time of rapture ! Clear and loud
 The village clock tolled six,—I wheeled about,
 Proud and exulting like an untired horse
 That cares not for his home. All shod with steel,
 We hissed along the polished ice in games
 Confederate, imitative of the chase
 And woodland pleasures,—the resounding horn,
 The pack loud chiming, and the hunted hare.

There are two episodes in the second book in which Wordsworth's soul was fostered by beauty rather than by fear. The pattern of these two incidents is simple—a period of noisy, violent exercise is followed by a moment of intense peace. First there is vigorous movement :

Our steeds remounted and the summons given,
 With whips and spur we through the chantry flew.
 ...through half an afternoon we played
 On the smooth platform, whether skill prevailed
 Or happy blunder triumphed, bursts of glee
 Made all the mountains ring ;

than a sudden substitution of this communal revelry by an individual note

...that single wren
Which one day sang so sweetly in the nave,
The Minstrel of the Troop.../Alone upon the rock.

The resulting emotion in each case is brought about by a melodious sound :

...I could have made
 My dwelling-place and lived for ever there
 To hear such music ;
 ...and left him there
 And rowed off gently, while he blew his flute.

It produces a clam which

...sank down
Into my heart and held me like a dream.

Wordsworth shows clearly that Nature's gentle ministrations alternate with sterner ones. He lays emphasis upon 'the discipline of fear'. Thus, when Wordsworth felt the loud dry wind blow through his ear and the clouds moved with what seemed a cosmic motion, the pleasure of exhilaration would be tempered by the peril of the ridge where he

...hung
Above the raven's nest, by knots of grass
And half-inch fissures in the slippery rock.

Then there is the description of the evening of fear when he stole the boat. He set a course by the 'summit of a craggy ridge', and rowed towards it

.. Justly
I dipped my oars into the silent lake.
And, as I rose upon the stroke, my boat
Went heaving through the water like a swan.

What follows is as unexpected to us as it was to the boy Wordsworth :

When from behind that craggy steep till then
The horizon's bound, a huge peak, black and huge,
As if with voluntary power instinct
Upreared its head.

It creates an alarm which persisted for many days and became an integral part of his personality, as the

...huge and mighty forms, that do not live
Like living men, moved slowly through the mind

and were a trouble to his dreams.

This is not simply a moral tale of a naughty boy being frightened by a mountain peak. It demonstrates also, by its careful account of a single fragment of experience, something of the way in which natural objects came to play an important part in Wordsworth's emotional life—the same sort of part that men and women might play in another man's life. We should remember that in such episodes Wordsworth is not advocating either sensationalism or brutality as an aid to spiritual development. He is thinking rather of the element of fear that may exist in such emotions as awe, bewilderment, and wonder.

It is interesting to note that Hartley put great emphasis on the early background and environment and expressed the view that the character of a man develops in his early years as a direct result of

his physical experiences and the feelings of pleasure and pain arising from such experiences. Wordsworth shows the influence of Hartley's associationism when he tells us in the first two books of The Prelude that his personality was shaped by Nature's impressive discipline of pleasure and pain in the formative years of boyhood.

*Q. 3. Consider the merits of 'The Prelude' as a spiritual autobiography.

Or

'The Prelude' or Growth of a Poet's Mind. What materials have you found in the poem to justify alternative title ?

Or

Consider the importance of 'The Prelude' for a study of Wordsworth's mind.

Or

Discuss 'The Prelude' as an expression of Romantic egotism.

Or

Discuss 'The Prelude' as the autobiography of Wordsworth's soul. (Guru Nanak University, 1973)

Or

Discuss 'The Prelude' as a spiritual autobiography of the poet. (Kurukshetra University, 1975)

Or

In what sense is 'The Prelude' an autobiographical poem ? (Meerut University, 1976)

Ans. The Prelude is a poem of personal experience. It is a record of the meaningful experiences of Wordsworth's life. In it Wordsworth has made a sincere effort to trace the growth and development of his inner powers, and in doing so he has done the biographer's work once and for all. He admits that it is a thing unprecedented in literary history that a man should talk so much about himself. While completing the first full draft of the poem, he wrote in a letter to Sir George Beaumont: "It is not self-conceit that has induced me to do this, but real humility. I began the work because I was unprepared to treat any more arduous subject, and diffident of my own powers. Here at least, I hoped that to a certain degree I should be sure of succeeding, as I had nothing to do but describe what I had felt and thought; therefore, could not easily be bewildered."

The Prelude is not Wordsworth's Confessions; it is what it professes to be, an account of the growth of a poet's mind. Its

MODEL QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

221

subject is not 'My Life', but 'The Making of a Poet'. In it Wordsworth tells the story of his inner life from earliest childhood up to 1798, the year of the Lyrical Ballads. As it is concerned with the development of the poet's sensibilities, only those aspects and events of his life which affected them are included. Books I and II deal with his early love of Nature and the growth of his consciousness of it. Books III, IV and VI are about his student life at Cambridge, although only book III concerns his actual residence in College. Book V deals with books and education. In Book VII he writes of London. Book VIII, with the strange sub-title 'Love of Nature Leading to Love of Man', links man and Nature by the pastoral convention. Books IX, X and XI are about the French Revolution as it affected him intellectually and emotionally. Books XII, XIII and XIV seek to show how the imagination, absorbing all experience and transending it, links mankind with divine.

In *The Prelude* Wordsworth introduces some of the clutter and contingency of ordinary experience; but he selects for extended treatment only those of his actions and experiences which are significant for the evolution of his soul. He has organised his life around an event which he regards as the spiritual crisis not of himself only, but of his generation: that shattering of the inordinate hopes for mankind which the liberal European intellectuals had invested in the French Revolution. As the poet says,

Not in my single self alone I found,
But in the minds of all ingenuous youth,
Change and subversion from this hour.

Does not attempt to bring the personality to the reader —

So the poem is ordered in three stages. There is a process of mental development which, although at times arrested, remains a continuum; this process is violently broken by a crisis of apathy and despair; but the mind then recovers an integrity which, despite admitted losses, is represented as a level higher than the initial unity, in that the mature mind possesses a new sensitivity of awareness, which is the product of the critical experiences it has undergone. The discovery of this fact resolves a central problem with which *The Prelude* is concerned—the problem of how to justify the human experience of pain and suffering; the poet is now able to realize that his life is 'in the end/ All gratulant if rightly understood'.

The Prelude is not a self-portrait. In it Wordsworth makes no attempt to bring his personality before the reader. It was not written with any particular public in view, unlike the *Lyrical Ballads*, which was deliberately calculated to make certain impressions on critics and readers. It was written, as it were, from the inside outwards. The frame of reference, that is, round which it is organized, lies deep down in the poet's mind. In *The Prelude* Wordsworth traces the details of the mind with extreme care; he holds a microscope over the small, almost invisible links that build up into principles, morals, and character. He makes an attempt to show what he and

It is a spiritual autobiography - the most interesting in English language -

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education, Bantala, Jamnagar

his poetry are made of, and they are not made only of great event and emotions, of marriage and passion and the French Revolution, but of small things that a less observant mind would have forgotten—of boating expeditions, of chance meetings with old soldiers, of dreams, of the noise of the wind in the mountains, of the sight of the ash tree outside his bedroom window. These small apparently disconnected incidents are to Wordsworth neither small nor disconnected. In the poem we see him tracing the links, joining them together, and working out their meanings.

The story of Wordsworth's inner life is punctuated with recurrent illuminations, and is climaxed by two major revelations. The first of these is Wordsworth's recognition of precisely what he has been born to be. At Cambridge he had reached a stage of life in which he had felt that he was 'a chosen Son', and on a walk home from a dance he had experienced an illumination that he should be 'A dedicated Spirit'; but to what dedicated, had not been specified. Now, however, the recovery from the crisis of despair after his commitment to the French Revolution comprises the insight that his role is to be one of the 'Poets, even as Prophets', each of whom is endowed with the power 'to perceive/Something unseen before', and so to write a new type of poetry. Wordsworth achieves his second revelation on a mountain top. The occasion is the ascent of Mount Snowdon. As he breaks through the cover of clouds, he sees the whole scene as 'the perfect image of a mighty Mind' in its continuously creative reciprocation with its milieu. What has been revealed to the poet in this symbolic scene is the grand locus of *The Recluse* which he announced in the Prospectus, 'The Mind of Man—/My haunt, and the main region of my song', as well as the 'high argument' of that poem, the union between the mind and the external world and the resulting 'creation...which they with blended might/Accomplish'.

The Prelude is not a straightforward autobiography. It is curiously deficient in the kind of material that an autobiographer usually records. Instead of pursuing a straight course, from birth through childhood to adolescence and manhood, Wordsworth proceeds by sometimes bewildering ellipses, fusions, and he says, 'motions retrograde' in time. The poet explores, he follows suggestions and possibilities, and at the beginning of the poem he has no real idea of where he will end up. It is a voyage of discovery. It is an admirable record of a soul's progress towards the full possession of self, which is implied in the apostolate of a poetic calling. It is a spiritual autobiography, the most interesting in the English language.

*Q. 4. Is it correct to describe 'The Prelude' as an epic poem? Give reasons for your answer.

Or

"In 'the Prelude' Wordsworth was attempting a new kind of epic." Discuss.

Or

How far, in your view, would it be correct to think of 'The Prelude' as an epic? Elaborate your viewpoint.

(Guru Nanak University, 1974)

Ans. The Prelude is the story of the evolution of Wordsworth's soul. Within this frame Wordsworth places the history of his life from the seed-time of childhood to those days when, chaunting alternate songs with Coleridge as they roamed the Quantock hills together, he was first fully conscious that his genius was bearing fruit. But this long poem is not a simple autobiography. It is the story of the growth of a poet's mind, and the poet is conceived, not merely as William Wordsworth, but as an ideal character progressing towards a state of blessedness in which he shall be fit to write that great philosophical poem conceived by Coleridge in the early years of their poetic faith. It is a spiritual autobiography of epic stature. Wordsworth's epic ambition has been fulfilled in it.

An epic is a poem on a grand scale, usually in a good many separate books, concerned with the exploits of some great national hero, historical or legendary. The epic poet introduces the supernatural element in his poem. The style of an epic poem is always dignified and grand. We find most of these characteristics of the epic in *The Prelude*.

An epic always begins by telling what it is going to sing. In the beginning of *Paradise Lost* Milton plays with a number of ideas, one of which is to write his epic in Latin, another to base it on an Arthurian theme. In the end he selects the subject of the fall of man. In the beginning of his epic poem Wordsworth chooses his subject in the manner of Milton. He first contemplates writing on some romantic theme left unsung by Milton, and then an epic of chivalry like Spenser's *Faerie Queene*. Then he examines sterner subjects as the exploits of Mithridates or Sertorius. But he abandons these subjects, and finally decides upon

some philosophic song
Of Truth that cherishes our daily life ;
With meditations passionate from deep
Recesses in man's heart, immortal verse
Thoughtfully fitted to the Orphean lyre.

As Ernest de Selincourt puts it : "Wordsworth was in evident agreement with Milton on the true nature of the epic subject. Both of them repudiated military exploits, 'hitherto the only argument heroic deemed', in the desire to bring within its confines a more spiritual conflict. Only the pedant will dissent from their conception ; and those who regard the mind of Wordsworth as both great in itself and

essentially representative of the highest, the imaginative type of mind, will recognize its adventures as a fit theme for epic treatment."

The only epic element that is conspicuously absent in *The Prelude* is the supernatural machinery. But the poem is not lacking in the element of the supernatural. It is produced by the poet's mystic experiences. The distinction between the natural and the supernatural is obviated through the power of Wordsworth's imagination. His sense of supernatural presences in Nature is so intense that he addresses them as

Ye Presences of Nature in the sky
And on the earth ! Ye Visions of the hills !
And Souls of lonely places ! can I think
A vulgar hope was yours when ye employed
Such ministry, when ye through many a year
Haunting me thus, among my boyish sports,
On caves and trees, upon the woods and hills,
Impressed upon all forms the characters
Of danger or desire ; and thus did make
The surface of the universal earth
With triumph and delight, with hope and fear,
Work like a sea ?

The Prelude is a very long poem. Like an epic, it is divided into books. Wordsworth obviously had classical models in mind when constructing *The Prelude*, but typically enough this epic poem has thirteen books, not the conventional twelve of *Paradise Lost* or the *Aeneid*. Wordsworth has preserved epic unity in this long poem by avoiding digressions. As P.M. Yarker says, "Wordsworth, thinking in terms of the epic journey of the soul, avoids digressions into aspects of the story that would be merely contingent to this theme or destructive of it." There are many examples, but the most obvious is the exclusion of all mention of Annette Vallon from the ninth book. Had the whole story been narrated at an important juncture in the poem, it would have changed the entire character of the whole. Conventional themes would inevitably have intervened, and the peculiar contact of the poem with the themes of the famous epics would have been destroyed.

The Prelude is one of the greatest poems in the English language grand in scale, grand in subject, grand in execution. A careful reading of the poem shows that there is an epic grandeur in its style. It has noticeable similarities to *Paradise Lost* ; it has the same metre, the same dignity and seriousness, and even in places the same highly involved sentence structure. Most frequently Wordsworth uses Miltonic language as a ready means of achieving a poetic and formal tone to counter-balance the matter-of-factness which Coleridge found so distressing in his verse. At its best it takes the form of a single Miltonic phrase in an otherwise conversational sentence, as, for example, in the following lines :

Sometimes mistaking vainly, as I fear,
Proud spring-tide swellings for a regular sea,
I settle on some British theme, some old
Romantic tale, by Milton left unsung.

At its worst it appears in a line such as the one addressed to Coleridge convalescing in Sicily—"Thine be those motions strong and sanative". But this is a rare instance in *The Prelude*; it is essentially a lapse of tone, of the sort that Wordsworth was capable of even during his best period.

Like Milton, Wordsworth has made admirable use of the epic simile in *The Prelude*. There are four formal epic similes in this poem: IV, 247-261; VIII, 711-751; IX, 1-7; X, 402-414. Two of these similes utilize the ancient figure of the poem as a journey over water: one on a still lake (IV, 247-261), the second on a river (IX, 1-7). As Curtius puts it: "The epic poet voyages over the open sea in a great ship, the lyric poet on a river in a small boat." The very modesty with which Wordsworth chooses not the sea but a smaller body of water, combined with the Miltonic elaborateness of his similes, indicates how *The Prelude* hovers between the poet's epic conception and its less traditionally epic subject matter.

Thus it is seen that *The Prelude* has all the essential features of an epic. However, it differs from the traditional epic in that it has no real story. An epic deals with actions, events and incidents, usually heroic or mythical. But *The Prelude* is not directly concerned with outward events, though they play their part; its action takes place not in the outside world but in the poet's mind. It is a modern epic. As an epic poem, *The Prelude* stands alone in English poetry. There is nothing quite like it. It is something unique in the literature of the world because it combines the epic power and range of poems like *The Divine Comedy* and *Paradise Lost* with the introspective voice of the poet himself.

Q. 5. "Books I and II of 'The Prelude' deal with Wordsworth's early love of Nature and the growth of his consciousness of it." Elaborate and illustrate. (Guru Nank University, 1979)

Ans. The first two books of *The Prelude* describe the 'fair seed time' of Wordsworth's soul, the formative years of his early life that were spent under the benign influence of Nature and that determined for ever the final mould in which his life and thought were to be cast. After an invocation to the mild creative breeze (his invocation to the muse in the typical Miltonic fashion) and having made an appraisal of his poetic assets, Wordsworth almost straightway plunges into a fascinating and breath-taking description of his love of Nature. *The Prelude* is sub-titled *The Growth of the Poet's Mind*, and since Wordsworth's mind grew under the direct influence of Nature. Nature, in a way, is present in every line of the poet. It is a pervading influence that informs every drift of the poem. But the first two books are almost exclusively devoted to it.

The description of Nature begins with a tribute to the river Derwent which, travelling over the green plains near the poet's sweet birth place, made sweet music through the night and day and which, with its steady cadence, tried to compose his thoughts 'to more than infant softness' and gave him

A foretaste, a dim earnest, of the calm
That Nature breathes among the hills and groves.

The Derwent appeared to him 'the fairest of all rivers'. Its murmuring sounds mingled with his nurse's song. It was 'a tempting playmate whom he dearly loved'. As a five-year old child, many times he spent the whole of a summer day bathing in a side-stream of this river and basking in the sun.

After describing his early experiences with trapping birds, robbing the nests of their eggs, and rowing a stolen boat across a lake to a huge cliff on the other bank—experiences that suggest the moralising influence of Nature—the poet once again comes to an experience of pure delight—his experience of skating on ice on the frozen lake in the frosty season. All shod with steel, he along with his friends, kissed along the polished ice in games, imitative of the chase and woodland pleasures. The din produced by the boys in the course of their skating was reverberated in the hills. The leafless trees and every icy crag tinkled like iron. The stars in the eastern sky shone clear, with the orange colour of the sunset in the western sky having faded away. Sometimes the poet withdrew from the noisy crowd of skaters, cast a sideway glance and playfully chased the reflection of a star in the ice, the reflection fleeing before him and shining in the ice. On certain other occasions when they had been freely whirling on the ice, he would suddenly stop and feel the solitary rocks still going round and around. Then it appeared to him as if the earth itself were revolving on its axis with visible movement to complete its daily round. The skating experience on the ice is a very thrilling episode that demonstrates the poet's early love of Nature.

Book II of *The Prelude* continues the description of his growing love for Nature. He still spent boisterous time and the years still passed 'with giddy motion'. But very soon he came to a stage when he developed a desire for calmer pleasures and when the beautiful objects of Nature became an essential background for all his games :

But the time approach'd
That brought with it a regular desire
For calmer pleasures, when the beauteous forms
Of Nature were collaterally attach'd
To every scheme of holiday delight,
And every boyish sport, less grateful else,
And languidly pursued.

At this stage Wordsworth recalls his rowing excursions to small islands in the Lake of Windermere. They would row to an island musical with birds that sang for ever or to another 'sown with lilies of the

MODEL QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

227

valley' or a third one where an old stone Table and a mouldered Cave presented a Hermit's history. These races pleased alike the conquered and the conqueror and they so ended that there was disappointment, uneasiness, pain or jealousy for none. The feelings of pride or vanity never took hold of them. Sometimes he and his friends would hire horses from an inn keeper and ride to distant places including an ancient temple built in honour of St. Mary, now badly dilapidated yet presenting a holy sight. This temple filled the poet's mind with feelings of deep repose and serenity. He recalls a wren whose singing he one day heard in the course of a horse-ride. The bird sang so sweetly that he felt he could have made his dwelling-place and lived for ever there to hear such divine music. He also recalls how he and his friends played in the small bowling-green with bursts of glee. Robert Greenwood, 'the Minstrel of the troupe' would often sit on a rook and play on his flute.

Both the sun and the moon held a strong attraction for the poet. He loved the sun for the sake of the radiant splendour with which it filled the hills and the mountains in the mornings and the evenings. The moon became dear to him because as he gazed at her, he felt that she belonged exclusively to the valley of Esthwaite and to no other region.

As Wordsworth describes his love for Nature, he also depicts the growth of his consciousness of it. In the beginning Nature exercised an unconscious influence on his mind. He loved Nature but he was absorbed more in his boyish games. The chastisement that Nature administered to him can also not be attributed exclusively to Nature. Every boy with a pure and open conscience is subject to such moralising visitations if he is guilty of any moral aberration. Then came the stage when Nature and games become inseparable, when the beautiful forms of Nature were collaterally attached to every scheme of holiday delight, when Nature became an essential background to the games. He loved his games, but he also loved Nature and he developed a consciousness that if Nature were absent, these games would not hold to him even half their delight. At the third stage he loved Nature because of the beauty it possessed and not because of the games connected with it :

The props of my affections were remov'd,
And yet the building stood, as if sustain'd
By its own spirit ! All that I beheld
Was dear to me, and from this cause it came,
That now to Nature's finer influxes
My mind lay open, to that more exact
And intimate communion which our hearts
Maintain with the minuter properties
Of objects which already are below'd
And of those only.

The 'props' were gone but the 'building' stood. He now felt the beauty of Nature for its own sake.

Q. 6. According to Wordsworth, it is 'the Mind of Man' that is to be the main region of this song. Examine how this theme is dealt with in 'The Prelude' (Books I and II) ? (Guru Nanak University, 1978)

Ans. In writing *The Prelude*, Wordsworth, notwithstanding the charge of egoism levelled against him, was not attempting an autobiography. The kind of material that usually goes into the making of an autobiographical work is conspicuously absent from *The Prelude*. It omits names of the persons associated with the poet ; it defies the chronological order, it does not touch all aspects of the poet's life. Throughout the poem, the poet maintains an impersonal attitude. Hence it should not be read as a self-portrait. We should believe Wordsworth when he says that *The Prelude* deals with 'the Growth of a Poet's Mind', or if we want to deviate from it, we can, alternatively, say that *The Prelude* deals with 'the Mind of Man' ; only it lays greater emphasis on the development of a man's sensibilities and dwells upon those aspects and incidents of life that have a direct and intimate bearing upon their development.

In the first two books of *The Prelude*, Wordsworth describes a number of experiences including trapping birds, stealing eggs from birds nests, laying hands on birds caught by others, rowing in a stolen boat, skating on a frozen lake in frosty season, boat races, horse riding, etc. These experiences have been gained under the direct supervision of Nature and they exercise a great moral influence on him. That is why they have been included.

Wordsworth was greatly influenced by the empiricist philosophy according to which a man's soul or spirit is the aggregate of his earthly experiences. An experience of the beauty of Nature produces feelings of benevolence towards man and leads to union with God. Similarly an experience of the sublime induces awe and fear of wrongdoing with a consequent enhanced awareness of the attractiveness of virtue and its eventual attainment. This theory appealed to Wordsworth because on the one hand it admits of the moral influence of Nature while on the other it leaves room for the idea that a divine spirit permeates the entire universe and is ever in communication with the souls of men. In Book I Wordsworth says :

Fair seed-time had my soul, and I grew up
Foster'd alike by beauty and by fear.

Here, Wordsworth, speaking for all men, talks of the two important agencies of beauty and fear, which correspond to the amiable and awful attributes of God and which, according to the associationist philosophy of David Hartley, implant virtue in the human soul. When Wordsworth made a prey of a bird actually trapped by someone else, he felt chastised by the moral and spiritual presence of Nature :

I heard among the solitary hills
Low breathings coming after me, and sounds

Of undistinguishable motion, steps
Almost as silent as the turf they trod.

Similarly when he rowed in a stolen boat, he immediately realised :

It was an act of stealth
And troubled pleasure ; not without the voice
Of mountain-echoes did my Boat move on.

In fact, in this adventure, he had 'severer intervention' from Nature and she dealt with him with 'ministry more palpable', for when he was about to reach the other bank, he felt a huge cliff uprearing its head :

the huge cliff
Rose up between me and the stars, and still,
With measur'd motion, like a living thing,
Strode after me.

This realisation made the poet think of the 'Wisdom and Spirit of the Universe', the soul which is 'the eternity of thought' and which helped to intertwine his human passions, not with the mean and vulgar works of man, but with high objects, with enduring things, with life and Nature, sanctifying both pain and fear and enabling him to recognise a grandeur in the beatings of his heart.

In fact, in this context, Wordsworth gives an admirable psychological insight in the working of human mind. The mind of man, says Wordsworth, is framed just like the breath and harmony of music. There is a dark, invisible workmanship that reconciles discordant elements. All the terrors, all the early miseries, regrets, vexations, lassitudes, combine and contribute to the calm and peace he is able to enjoy during certain periods of his life. And he feels grateful to Nature for this great benevolence shown to him.

In Book II, in another very perceptive passage, the poet depicts the growth of the mind as a continuous process in which the stages of development cannot be clearly demarcated :

But who shall parcel out
His intellect, by geometric rules,
Split, like a province, into round and square ?

And he goes on to suggest that rational processes, when applied to the mind, only falsify the reality. Reason tries to locate boundaries where none exist. Science is thus a 'sucedaneum', a substitute for true knowledge, likely to foster error. Truth or reality can only be apprehended by imagination and not by scientific analysis. Here Wordsworth is applying transcendental theory of knowledge to human mind.

Another reflective passage deals with the psychology of the child. The child represents the simplest example of the unifying power of the imagination. The child, according to Wordsworth, represents 'the first poetic spirit of our human life'. It knows its mother by

her different attributes—arms, hands, breasts, face—but it unifies these attributes into one ‘beloved Presence’. This process is extended to the environment as well and the child’s imagination links its love for the mother with the various objects it sees around it.

Apart from these passages where the poet deals with the human mind at great length and goes on even to illustrate the points he makes, he has also made random observations about the human mind, and in particular about the poet’s mind. For example, he talks of the ‘unruly’ times, or the periods of depression, that a poet, very much like a lover, has to go through. Towards the end of Book II, he once again refers to the exalting influence Nature can exercise on a man’s mind, the kind of influence that can make him retain his faith in mankind even in the times of ‘dereliction and dismay’.

Q. 7. “Hard task, vain hope, to analyse the mind.....” Examine, in the light of this remark, the picture of human mind that is presented in ‘The Prelude’.
(Delhi University, 1978)

For answer refer to Q. 6.

Q. 8. “‘The Prelude’ is concerned not with Wordsworth the private person but with the poet’s mind.” How far is this statement true of the first two books.
(Guru Nanak University, 1977)

Ans. *The Prelude* is often read as an autobiographical poem—as the autobiography of Wordsworth—which is a certain way of misinterpreting it. In Book I, when Wordsworth is confronted with the difficult task of choosing a subject for his poem, and he rejects the chronicles of heroes and kings, he toys with the idea of shaping out ‘some tale from my own heart’

more near akin
To my own passions and habitual thoughts,
Some variegated story, in the main
Lofty, with interchange of gentler things.

It is obvious from these lines that he is thinking of attempting autobiography. But no sooner does this thought occur to him than ‘deadening admonitions’ succeed,

And the whole beauteous Fabric seems to lack
Foundation, and, withal, appears throughout
Shadowy and unsubstantial.

He is thus deterred from the thought.

And yet in *The Prelude* Wordsworth tells a great deal about himself. In fact, he was quite conscious that ‘it was a thing unprecedented in literary history that a man should talk so much about himself’. He was afraid that he might be charged with vanity, and he offered clarification: ‘It is not self-conceit that has induced me to do this, but real humility. I began the work because I was unprepared to treat any more arduous subject, and diffident of my

own powers. Here, at last, I hoped that to a certain degree I should be sure of succeeding, as I had nothing to do but describe what I have felt and thought ; therefore, I could not easily be bewildered."

How do we reconcile the facts that he feels admonished when he thinks of writing an autobiography and yet he ultimately writes one, that he talk so much about himself, yet he says that he does it in 'real humility' and also makes it difficult for us to take the poem as autobiographical. We can be a little surer of the stand to take if we cast just a cursory glance over the first book of *The Prelude*. His talk about himself begins with the following lines :

Fair seed-time had my soul, and I grew up
Foster'd alike by beauty and by fear.

About his early life, his only statements are :

Much favour'd in my birthplace, and no less
In that beloved vale to which, ere long,
I was transplanted.

The narrative begins with an experience, 'ere I had seen Nine summers', with an experience of wandering half the night among the cliffs and the smooth hollows where the woodcocks ran along the open turf. These details are totally lacking in names and precise references. There is no mention of his parentage ; he does not name the valley in which he was born though he does say he was much favoured in his birth there ; the first experience he has chosen takes place when he is already nine and though he talks about the cliffs, he does not locate them. It is, thus, clear that *The Prelude* is not simply the life of a poet. In fact, it is about the poet as poet and not as an individual person. As the sub-title so clearly indicates, it deals with the growth of a poet's mind and all the details of his life that are not relevant to this growth are rigidly excluded. Wordsworth himself was quite clear about this. That is why he thought that though he would be talking so much about himself he would not be guilty of being conceited.

The Prelude is, then, concerned with the poet's mind, in this case a romantic poet who, like the great Milton, had very high notions of the poet's calling and who subjected himself to the formative influence of Nature and had his sensibility refined and sublimated. In the beginning, Wordsworth was 'fostered alike by beauty and fear'. Beauty and fear are two inseparable attributes of God. Blake was conscious of them when he talked of the fearful symmetry of the tiger. An awareness of God's beauty enlarges poet's sympathies and makes him reach out to the entire humanity. The consciousness of the awful attributes of God, on the other hand, exercises a restraining and chastising influence and checks waywardly thoughts and actions. Wordsworth felt low breathings coming after him and heard sounds of undistinguishable motion when he laid his hands upon birds trapped by someone else. And when he was robbing the birds' nests of their eggs, he heard strange utterances from the loud dry wind and both

the earth and the sky seemed to be chiding him. In the stolen boat episode, Wordsworth was conscious of his guilt and rowing across the lake could give him only 'troubled pleasure'. In fact he had the strange experience of finding that

the huge cliff
Rose up between me and the stars, and still
With measur'd motion, like a living thing,
Strode after me.

As suggested earlier, both Milton and Wordsworth thought very highly of a poet. They thought of a poet as an exalted being capable of sublime and elevated thoughts. When Wordsworth subjected himself to the influence of Nature, his sensibility was refined and he made preparations to be a great poet. In a famous passage that concludes the stolen boat episode, he pays a tribute to the 'Wisdom and Spirit of the Universe' for having intertwined for him

The passions that build up our human soul,
Not with the mean and vulgar works of Man,
But with high objects, with enduring things
With life and Nature, purifying thus
The elements of feeling and of thought,
And sanctifying, by such discipline,
Both pain and fear, until we recognise
A grandeur in the beatings of the heart.

The poet's mind keeps receiving diverse impressions from all sources. Many of these impressions are at variance with one another. They have all to be interwoven in some kind of harmony before they can be distilled into a poem. In *The Prelude*, Book I, Wordsworth refers to some 'dark invisible workmanship'

that reconciles
Discordant elements, and makes them move
In one society.

In Wordsworth's theory of poetry, poetry is the expression of the emotion recollected in tranquillity, of the emotion free from immediate provocation and stimulation. In that state of tranquillity, all the random experience sink into a state of harmony and concord. This state of a poet's mind is suggested in Book I :

Ah me ! that all
The terrors, all the early miseries
Regrets, vexations, lassitudes, that all
The thoughts and feelings which have been infus'd
Into my mind, should ever have made up
The calm existence that is mine when I
Am worthy of myself.

In conclusion, it is justified to assert that *The Prelude* is concerned not with Wordsworth the private person but with the poet's mind. Only this statement can be slightly extended to include within its

range of validity not only a poet but man in general. Most of the passages in which Wordsworth offers an insight into the working of a poet's mind can also be applied to other human beings. Wordsworth talks about a poet because his subject was the growth of a poet's mind.

Q. 9. How does Wordsworth account for the overmastering influence of Nature on his development from your reading of *The Prelude* Book I and II ?
(Mysore University, 1978)

Ans. In *The Prelude*, Wordsworth expresses his unflinching faith in the moralising influences of Nature and submits himself willingly to her over-mastering influence. In the very opening lines of Book I, when the poet feels gratified at his new-gained freedom, he dwells, with great satisfaction, on the prospects of spending his time in groves and valleys and on the banks of streams that will lull him to rest with their soft murmur. He seizes this opportunity to express his faith in Nature :

and should the guide I chuse
Be nothing better than a wandering cloud,
I cannot miss my way.

And Nature is not only a guiding spirit, it is a moulding and shaping spirit also. In *Tintern Abbey*, Wordsworth says that it is Nature's privilege, through all the years of this our life, to lead from joy to joy

for she can so inform
The mind that is within us, so impress
With quietness and beauty, and so feed
With lofty thoughts, that neither evil tongues,
Rash judgments, nor the sneers of selfish men,
Nor greetings where no kindness is, nor all
The dreamy intercourse of daily life,
Shall e'er prevail against us, or disturb
Our cheerful faith, that all which we behold
Is full of blessings.

And almost similar faith Wordsworth expresses towards the end of Book II :

The gift is yours ; if in these times of fear,
This melancholy waste of hopes o'erthrown,
If, 'mid indifference and apathy
And wicked exultation, when good men,
On every side fall off we know not how,
To selfishness, disguis'd in gentle names
Of peace, and quiet, and domestic love,
Yet mingled, not unwillingly, with sneers
On visionary minds; if in this time
Of dereliction and dismay, I yet

Despair not of our nature ; but retain
 A more than Roman confidence, a faith
 That fails not, in all sorrow my support,
 The blessing of my life, the gift is yours,
 Ye mountains ! thine, O Nature ! Thou hast fed
 My lofty speculations ; and in thee,
 For this uneasy heart of ours I find
 A never-failing principle of joy,
 And purest passion.

Wordsworth has great faith in the moralising influence of Nature. In one of the Lucy poems, *Three Years She Grew in Sun and Shower*, he talks of an overseeing power in Nature that has the power 'to kindle and restrain'; to kindle and inspire noble thoughts and to restrain any waywardly impulses. In *The Prelude* Book I also, the poet refers to his early childhood days when he often indulged in common boyish pranks like trapping birds, catching hold of birds trapped by others, or robbing birds' nests of their eggs, that may be considered morally wrong. On all these occasions he felt as if he were being admonished by Nature. When he grabbed birds ensnared by others, he felt 'low breathings' coming after him and heard 'sounds of undistinguishable motion'. And when he plundered the birds' nests, loud dry wind blew through his ears and rebuked him with strange utterances. And sometimes, when his guilt was more serious, Nature employed

Severer interventions, ministry
 More palpable.

This is what happened in the episode dealing with the stolen boat. As he started lustily rowing the boat he had loosened on the bank, he was conscious of the fact that it was an act of stealth and he could experience only 'troubled pleasure'. He was rowing towards a craggy ridge that appeared to be the bound of the horizon, but as he neared it

the huge cliff
 Rose up between me and the stars, and still
 With measur'd motion like a living thing,
 Strode after me.

He felt admonished, replaced the boat from where he had taken and returned home. But for many days to come

my brain
 Work'd with a dim and undetermin'd sense
 Of unknown modes of being, in my thoughts,
 there was darkness...

Wordsworth also attributes to Nature the power to harmonise diverse elements and experiences. He compares the mind of men to the breath and harmony of music and goes on to say :

There is a dark
Invisible Workmanship that reconciles
Discordant elements, and makes them
move in one society.

All the terrors, all the early miseries, regrets, vexations, lassitudes, all of them contribute to make up

The calm existence that is mine when I
Am worthy of myself !

So much for the over-mastering influence that Nature exercises on the growth of the poet's mind. One would naturally get curious to find out how Wordsworth accounts for this influence. Wordsworth gradually came to developed a pantheistic view of Nature. He felt that there was a divine spirit present in Nature that permeates every object. In *Tintern Abbey*, he says :

And I have felt
A presence that disturbs me with the joy
Of elevated thoughts ; a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused,
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
And the round ocean and the living air,
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man :
A motion and a spirit, that impels
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
And rolls through all things.

And in the opening lines of *The Prelude*, Book I he invests the gentle breeze blowing from the green fields, the clouds and the sky with a universal spirit :

it bets against my cheek,
And seems half-conscious of the joy it gives.
In another celebrated passage, he addresses Nature as
Wisdom and Spirit of the universe !
Thou soul that are the eternity of though !
That giv'st to forms and images a breath
And everlasting motion.

Nature is thus identified with the universal spirit. It is an overseeing power. It is the breath of the very existence of the universe.

While Nature is identified with the universal spirit, human mind is represented as its agent :

his mind,
Even as an agent of the one great mind,
Creates, creator and receiver both,
Working but in alliance with the works
Which it beholds.

Thus a kind of kinship is established between Nature and the human mind, a kinship that makes possible an active intercourse between the two and facilitates the exercise of Nature's influence on human mind.

14

Exercises

1. Examine the theme of 'The Prelude' Book I.
2. What do you learn of Wordsworth's attitude to nature from 'The Prelude', Book I ?
(Meerut University—M.A. 1973)
3. Basing yourself on a study of Books I & II of 'The Prelude', trace the course of growth of Wordsworth's love of nature and its intimate connection with his mind.
4. "The best of Wordsworth's poetic impulses had come to him from Nature through the gates of the senses."

Elucidate the above with reference to your study of the first two Books of 'The Prelude'.

5. 'The child is father of the man', wrote Wordsworth in another poem. What did he mean by this ? How is it demonstrated in 'The Prelude', Books I and II ?

6. "In earlier books of 'The Prelude' Wordsworth glorifies the inward vision that takes its rise in childhood intuitions."

Discuss from your study of the first two Books of 'The Prelude'.

7. "The purpose of 'The Prelude' may, indeed, be said to search out and seize, among the many seemingly alien and incongruous images of self-cast up by reflection, the image of the poet's true being, of his slowly self-realizing individuality, of that in him in virtue of which he is a 'dedicated spirit'."

Discuss from your study of 'The Prelude', Books I and II.

8. "In 'The Prelude' is traced the growth of a mind which fought its way ..to rich and integrated personality." Amplify.

9. "All Wordsworth's poetry consists of variations on the theme of 'Tintern Abbey'."

Comment on this observation in relation to 'The Prelude', Books I and II.

10. How successful is Wordsworth in integrating the various strands of thought and feeling in the first two books of 'The Prelude'? Is it possible to separate the 'philosophy' from the 'experience'?

11. "The success of 'The Prelude' depends upon genuine personal experience being available to validate, by its work upon the reader, what otherwise would be a series of empty assertions."

Comment on this observation in relation to Books I and II.

12. "In 'The Prelude' we see the imagination working at two stages, first on the incident (e.g. the stealing of the boat) and then on recollection where it takes on a universal significance. In this way the poem illustrates the source and operation of the imagination."

Discuss and amplify.

13. "To him (Wordsworth) nature appears as a formative influence superior to any other, the educator of senses and mind alike, the sower in our hearts of the deep-laid seeds of our feeling and beliefs."

Discuss with illustrative references to 'The Prelude', Books I and II.

14. "'The Prelude' can only be called subjective autobiography."

Substantiate this statement.

15. What position does 'The Prelude' occupy in the total development of Wordsworth's mind and art?

16. Wordsworth's 'Prelude' reveals the poet's most intense conviction in 'Nature's mighty formative power' influencing human lives.

Assess the above statement with reference to the chapter prescribed for your study.

17. Indicate the place of 'The Prelude' in the growth of Wordsworth's poetic mind and art.

18. The most significant thing about Wordsworth's writing in 'The Prelude' is the way he integrates the past and the present: and not by way of nostalgia, as it might be, 'mixing memory and desire', but positively, the past in the present for the future.

Examine the statement.

[Ambitious students are advised to read the poem and the critical essays in my book carefully before answering the above questions.]

—The Author

15

Select Bibliography

- Abercrombie, Lascelles—*The Art of Wordsworth*.
Abrams, Meyer—*The Mirror and The Lamp*.
Abrams, Meyer—*Natural Supernaturalism*.
Abrams, Meyer—ed. *English Romantic Poets*.
Abrams, Meyer—ed. *Wordsworth : A Collection of Critical Essays*.
Arnold, Matthew—'Wordsworth', in *Essays in Criticism, Second Series*.
Bate, Walter Jackson—*From Classic to Romantic*.
Bateson, F.W.—*Wordsworth : A Reinterpretation*.
Beach, Joseph Warren—*The Concept of Nature in Nineteenth-Century English Poetry*.
Beatty, Arthur—*William Wordsworth*.
Bloom, Harold—*The Visionary Company*.
Bradley, A.C.—*Oxford Lectures*.
Bush, Douglas—*Mythology and the Romantic Tradition in English Poetry*.
Danby, John F.—*The Simple Wordsworth*.
Danby, John F.—*Wordsworth : The Prelude and Other Poems*.
Darbishire, Helen—*Wordsworth*.
Darbishire, Helen—ed. *The Prelude*.
de Selincourt, Ernest—*The Early Wordsworth*.
de Selincourt, Ernest—ed. *The Prelude*.
Empson, William—*Seven Types of Ambiguity*.
Ford, Boris—*From Blake to Byron*.
Garrod, H.W.—*Wordsworth : Lectures and Essays*.
Grierson, Herbert J.C.—*Milton and Wordsworth : Poets and Prophets*.
Hartman, Geoffrey—*The Unmediated Vision*.
Hartman, Geoffrey—*Wordsworth's Poetry, 1787-1814*.
Havens, R.D.—*The Mind of a Poet*.

SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY

239

- Herford, C.H.—*The Age of Wordsworth*.
 Hough, Graham—*The Romantic Poets*.
 Knight, G. Wilson—*The Starlit Dome : Studies in the Poetry of Vision*.
 Langbaum, Robert—*The Poetry of Experience*.
 Leavis, F.R.—*Revaluation : Tradition and Development in English Poetry*.
 Legouis, Emile—*The Early Life of William Wordsworth*.
 Lindenberger, H.—*On Wordsworth's Prelude*.
 Margoliouth, H.M.—*Wordsworth and Coleridge, 1795-1834*.
 Moorman, Mary—*William Wordsworth : A Biography*.
 Onorato, Richard J.—*The Character of the Poet : Wordsworth in The Prelude*.
 Pater, Walter—*Appreciations*.
 Praz, Mario—*The Romantic Agony*.
 Releigh, Walter—*Wordsworth*.
 Read, Herbert—*Wordsworth*.
 Read, Herbert—*The True Voice of Feeling*.
 Stephen, Leslie—*Hours in a Library, Vol. 3*.
 Trilling, Lionel—*The Liberal Imagination*.
 Willey, Basil—*The Seventeenth-Century Background*.
 Willey, Basil—*The Eighteenth-Century Background*.
 Yarker, P.M.—ed. *The Prelude*.

[Students are advised to have by their side as many of the above reference books as practicable.]

—The Author

Predman Krishen Dhar
 M.A. (Pol. Sc. Eco. Eng. Hist.) B.Ed.
 Motiyar Rainawari
 SRINAGER-190003
 KASHMIR

Appendix

Miltonic Influence on 'The Prelude'

Introduction

The composition of *The Prelude* encompasses two distinctly separate phases of Wordsworth's development, at the beginning and the end, respectively, of his glorious period. *The Prelude* of 1898-99, to be sure, speaks in largely as single voice—the voice of enraptured memory, for which *Tintern Abbey* sets the keynote. But *The Prelude* of 1804-5 speaks in many voices. Apart from the fact of the variety of voices, perhaps the most notable of the language of the 1804-5 *Prelude*, as compared to that of the earlier parts, is the pervasive presence of Milton—both the Milton whom Wordsworth studied directly and the Milton whom he approached through his eighteenth-century imitators. There are Miltonic elements, of course, in the 1798-99 *Prelude*, as there are in all non-dramatic blank verse before the twentieth century. But Wordsworth's verse does not become noticeably Miltonic until after the period—beginning with his residence Grasmere in 1800—that he undertook an intensive study of the earlier poet. It is significant, for instance, that the list of direct Miltonic echoes in *The Prelude* which appears in R.D. Havens' monumental study of Milton's influence on English verse is virtually limited to the parts of the poem written in 1804-5.

Miltonic Echoes in the Poem

There are many Miltonic echoes in *The Prelude*. One echo, indeed, is hardly disguised; even the most casual reader must recognize in

The earth is all before me : with a heart
Joyous, nor scar'd at its own liberty,
I look about, and should the guide I choose
Be nothing better than a wandering cloud,
I cannot miss my way.

an allusion to Adam and Eve :

The world was all before them, where to choose
Their place of rest, and Providence their guide :

The hand in hand with wandering steps and slow,
Through Eden took their solitary way.

(*Paradise Lost*, XII, 646-9)

Paradise Lost ends where *The Prelude* begins. Adam and Eve have lost their Paradise ; Wordsworth is about to enter his Paradise Regained. Their guide is Divine Providence ; his is the providence of Nature, 'a wandering cloud. . . a twig or any floating thing'. This natural providence is, of course, given strong religious overtones. The note struck by the 'blessing in this gentle breeze' is continued through 'miraculous gift. . . dedicate...consecrate. . . the sweetbreath of Heaven to conclude in 'The holy life of music and of verse'. But though Nature restores to Wordsworth a paradise within him, happier far, he, too, suffers a fall from innocence to experience, from imagination to Godwinian rationalism. For Wordsworth, as for his parodist, Shelley, 'Hell is a city much like London' and so at the outset he celebrates his release :

O welcome Messenger ! O welcome Friend !
A captive greets thee, coming from a house
Of bondage, from yon City's walls set free,
A prison where he hath been long immured.

This again recalls a famous passage from *Paradise Lost* in which Satan in the Garden of Eden is described, the passage beginning

As one who long in populous city pent
Where Houses thick and Sewers annoy the air. . .

(*Paradise Lost*, IX, 444 ff)

But it also invokes yet another Miltonic character ; we may remember Samson's opening lines :

A little onward lend thy guiding hand
To these dark steps, a little further on ;
For yonder bank hath choice of Sun or shade.
There I am wont to sit, where any chance
Relieves me from my task of servile toil,
Daily in the common prison else enjoyn'd me,
Where I a prisoner chain'd, scarce freely draw
The air imprison'd also, chose and damp,
Unwholesome draught : but here I feel amends,
The breath of Heav'n fresh-blowing, pure and sweet,
With day-spring born : here leave me to respire.

(*Samson Agonistes*, 1-11)

Wordsworth is no longer a 'captive' in 'bondage' ; he is already
from yon City's walls set free,

A prison where he hath been long immured.

and, like Samson, he too feels 'the sweet breath of Heaven'. In *Samson Agonistes* we are entitled to feel 'the breath of Heav'n fresh-blowing' as a poetic anticipation of that other breath of Heaven

which will revive Samson ; under that divine inspiration he will change from patient to agent and will move forward to heroic action. So for Wordsworth the breath of nature portends that internal breeze of poetic inspiration ; he, too, will move forward to his dedicated task, enjoying

the hope
Of active days, of dignity and thought,
Of prowess in an honourable field.

These Miltonic echoes have far more than a purely local importance in *The Prelude*. One of their functions is to signal to us that while this is not a poem cast in the traditional epic mould, yet it is still a poem of epic seriousness, commanding responses appropriate to that kind of verse. But, beyond this such echoes play their part in contributing to the general density and weight of Wordsworth's poetry. Wordsworth is frequently austere ; he is sometimes prosaic ; but he is hardly even thin.

Miltonic Language in the Poem

But the essential Miltonic influence on *The Prelude* is of a different order. In several places one finds the deliberately humorous Miltonizing (or mock-Miltonizing) which Cowper exploited so well, for instance, in Wordsworth's portrait of the fashionable London preacher or in the playful line describing his entrance into Cambridge. "And at the Hoop we landed, famous Inn" a line which Arnold, incidentally—in the only touchstone he ever drew from *The Prelude*—misread while trying to illustrate the negative effect of Milton's influence on English poetry in general ("What leagues of lumbering movement ! what desperate endeavours. . . to render a platitude endurable by making it pompous !")

Most frequently Miltonic language serves Wordsworth as a ready means of achieving a poetic and formal tone to counter-balance the matter-of-factness which Coleridge found so distressing in his verse. At its best it takes the form of a single Miltonic phrase in an otherwise conversational sentence as, for instance, in the following lines :

Sometimes, mistaking vainly, as I fear,
Proud spring-tide swellings for a regular sea,
I settle on some British theme, some old
Romantic tale, by Milton left unsung. (I, 177-80)

Up to the final phrase, with its inverted Miltonic syntax, Wordsworth speaks fully in his own voice—casual, in fact ("as I fear". "some old/Romantic tale"), with hints of his language of personal vision ("proud spring-tide swelling").

The concluding phrase, which itself echoes Milton's statement rejecting an heroic British theme ("the better fortitude/Of Patience and Heroic Martyrdom/Unsung"—P.L., IX, 31-33), serves to lift

the tone to a more formal level, to interrupt his meandering of thought with a new and sterner perspective on his search for a proper theme. In such instances the interplay between Wordsworthian and Miltonic voices gives life to his language, but once the balance is destroyed, as often in the later Wordsworth, the Miltonic takes over and deadens the whole. At its worst it appears in a line such as the one addressed to Coleridge convalescing in Sicily—"Thine be those motions strong and sanative" (X, 978). But this is a rare instance in *The Prelude*; it is essentially a lapse of tone, of the sort that Wordsworth was capable of even during his best years: one could, in fact, divide his lapses into two distinct categories—those in the direction of matter-of-factness ("My drift hath scarcely, I fear, been obvious"—V, 290-91) and those, like the one above, which take a 'poetic', that is, Miltonic direction.

There is a particular type of Miltonic passage in *The Prelude* which, though it reads as the sort of set piece which may bore or irritate the modern reader, has a functional enough role within the scheme of the poem. An example is the description of the gardens of Gehol. The Miltonic formality of the description is occasioned by the fact that Wordsworth cites these gardens as an artificial paradise, like Milton's "faire field/Of Enna," to contrast with a more genuine image of paradise; and afterwards, when Wordsworth comes to speak of his real paradise, the language gradually takes on a more conversational tone. For Wordsworth, being formal means being more or less Miltonic, and at numerous points it suits his purposes, within the design of the poem, to don Milton's formal singing robes.

Conclusion

The Miltonic element in *The Prelude*—and it is something in the very grain of the poem, in the syntax, the tone, the meaning—has made the poem relatively rough-going for the modern reader, who, after the successful revolt of Eliot and Pound against the 'damage' that Milton did to English verse, is rarely prepared to respond favourably to any sort of Miltonizing, good or bad.

(Based on Harvey & Lindenberger)

16

Tintern Abbey

I. TEXT

Lines Composed A Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey, on
Revisiting The Banks of The Wye During A Tour.
July 13, 1798

Five years have past ; five summers, with the length

Of five long winters ! and again I hear

These waters, rolling from their mountain-springs

With a soft inland murmur. — Once again

Do I behold these steep and lofty cliffs,

That on a wild secluded scene impress

Thoughts of more deep seclusion ; and connect

The landscape with the quiet of the sky.

The day is come when I again repose

Here, under this dark sycamore, and view

These plots of cottage-ground, these orchard-tufts,

Which at this season, with their unripe fruits,

Are clad in one green hue, and lose themselves

'Mid groves and copses. Once again I see

These hedge-rows, hardly hedge-rows, little lines

Of sportive wood run wild : these pastoral farms,

Green to the very door ; and wreaths of smoke

Sent up, in silence, from among the trees !

With some uncertain notice, as might seem

Of vagrant dwellers in the houseless woods,

Or of some Hermit's cave, where by his fire

The Hermit sits alone.

The beautiful forms,

Through a long absence, have not been to me.

As is a landscape to blind man's eye

But oft, in lonely rooms, and 'mid the din

Of towns and cities, I have owed to them

In hours of weariness, sensations sweet,

Felt in the blood, and felt along the heart :

And passing even into my purer mind,

With tranquil restoration, — like some gleam

Of good — that has been

Of good — that has been

Of good — that has been

See
Particular
deeper to
house of
long lines
conformity
green appear
ance.

gipsies

thoughts
absent for
long time.
wise and
distractions

add to loneliness of the
scene 5

Age, mountains look callid
with sky

just lines of shrubs &
business growing 15

as a hermit's cave
giving rise to smoke 20

In meditation of silent prayer -

not of blind men to the scenes of
nature.

25

words worth used even to derive a spiritual pleasure from
the world of nature - all this complete

Of unremembered pleasure : such, perhaps,
 As have no slight or trivial influence
 On that best portion of good man's life,
 His little, nameless, unremembered, acts
 Of kindness and of love. (Nor less, I trust, *the poet believes that he has*
 To them I may have owed another gift, *received another consolation*
 Of aspect more sublime ; that blessed mood, *has put him in possession*
 In which the burthen of the mystery, *which has deluded him of late*
 In which the heavy and the weary weight *beardens imposed by life*
 Of all this unintelligible world, *is lifted of the universe -*
 Is lightened) — that serene and blessed mood, *in such a mood as*
 In which the affections gently lead us on, *which is led by over-insights*
 Until, the breath of this corporeal frame *we feel that our breathing*
 And even the motion of our human blood *circulations of blood has*
 Almost suspended, we are laid asleep *slip past. we become forgetful*
 In body, and become a living soul *of body & remembrance*
 While with an eye made quiet by the power *by means of our insight*
 Of harmony, and the deep power of joy, *we are as a fortress*
 We see into the life of things *understand meaning & purpose of nature -*

Belief

Be but a vain belief, yet, oh ! how oft —
 In darkness and amid the many shapes
 Of joyless daylight ; when the fretful stir
 Unprofitable, and the fever of the world, *disturb my movement*
 Have hung upon the beatings of my heart, *have distracted my mind -*
 How oft, in spirit, have I turned to thee,
 O sylvan Wye ! thou wanderer thro' the woods, *thou discipline I have*
 How often has my spirit turned to thee ! *turned to you -*

And now, with gleams of half-extinguished thought, *half forgotten*
 With many recognitions dim and faint, *with the passage of time -*
 And somewhat of a sad perplexity, *the memory comes to me again*
 The picture of the mind revives again.

While here I stand, not only with the sense *it is not a source of*
 Of present pleasure, but with pleasing thoughts *present joy but for*
 That in this moment there is life and food, *future years as well -*
 For future years. And so I dare to hope, *ventures to hope -*
 Though changed, no doubt, from what I was when first
 I came among these hills ; when like a roe *animal*

Things changed since he first

I bounded o'er the mountains, by the sides
 Of the deep rivers, and the lonely streams,
 Wherever nature led : more like a man *at that time he stood in awe*
 Flying from something that he dreads, than one *of nature's things*
 Who sought the thing he loved. For nature then *he - a*

(The coarser pleasure of my boyish days, *as a boy nature was all with*
 And their glad animal movements all gone by) *to him*
 To me was all in all. — I cannot paint
 What then I was. The sounding cataract *that period all over -*
 Haunted me like a passion : the tall rock,
 The mountain, and the deep and gloomy wood, *physical outward beauty -*

He has crested in the midst of nature, more wells
one mountain & one valley
one attitude of nature and human mind
mood of life.

He felt a rapture at the sight of these objects. It was
the purely physical beauty of nature that charmed him -

2
But that time is over now -

Presence of divine spirit & lofty thoughts

Example of young couple & what they are best and true with the passage of time - become spiritual relations before

His purest & noblest thoughts are strengthened by nature, his long. She speaks.

Sister Dorothy - See

100.

105.

110.

120.

125.

Their colours and their forms, were then to me
An appetite; a feeling and a love, *at that time the physical beauty*
That had no need of a remoter charm, *of nature did not need* 80.
By thought supplied, nor any interest *to be supplied* *mentally by spiritual*
Unborrowed from the eye. — That time is past, *signifi comes.*
And all its aching joys are now no more, *intolerable joys -*
And all its dizzy raptures. Not for this *I do not mourn* *my* 85 *lives*
Faint I, nor mourn nor murmur; other gifts *of pleasures -*
Have followed; for such loss, I would believe, *other joys have*
Abundant recompense. For I have learned
To look on nature, *not as in the hour* *now as he has witnessed the*
Of thoughtless youth; but hearing oftentimes *sufferings & misfortunes*
The still, sad music of humanity, *to him but purifying, effect on him.*
Nor harsh nor grating, though of ample power, *it leads a spiritual*
To chasten and subdue. And I have felt *meaning, as nature -*
A presence that disturbs me with the joy
Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused, *far more connected* 95 -
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns, *this divine spirit is*
And the round ocean and the living air, *found in setting suns*
And the blue sky and in the mind of man;
A motion and a spirit, that impels
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
And rolls through all things. Therefore am I still
A lover of the meadows and the woods,
And mountains; and of all that we behold *see*
From this green earth; of all the mighty world
Of eye, and ear, — both what they half create,
And what perceive; well pleased to recognise
In nature and the language of the sense,
The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse,
The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul
Of all my moral being. *is happy to find that*
Nor perchance, *quite possible not to have*
If I were not thus taught, should I the more developed *this view of nature*
Suffer my genial spirits to decay *since I have entered thy thoughts &*
For thou art with me here upon the banks *suffer -*
Of this fair river; thou my dearest Friend,
My dear, dear Friend; and in thy voice I catch
The language of my former heart, and read
My former pleasures in the shooting lights
Of thy wild eyes. Oh! yet a little while
May I behold in thee what I was once,
My dear, dear Sister! and this prayer I make,
Knowing that Nature never did betray
The heart that loved her; 'tis her privilege,
Through all the years of this our life, to lead
From joy to joy: for she can so inform
The mind that is within us, so impress

*nature can so mould and strengthen our minds that no
evil can disturb or upset our mental equilibrium
People can disturb us as far as forming hasty judgments,
Sorrowful looks, making outward show shall not
disturb us - all things shall appear blessed to us.*

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantala, Jammu
TINTERN ABBEY

With quietness and beauty, and so feed
With lofty thoughts, that neither evil tongues,
Rash judgments, nor the sneers of selfish men,
Nor greetings where no kindness is, nor all
The dreary intercourse of daily life,
Shall e'er prevail against us, or disturb
Our cheerful faith, that all which we behold
Is full of blessings. Therefore let the moon
Shine on thee in thy solitary walk;
And let the misty mountain-winds be free
To blow against thee: and, in after years,
When these wild ecstasies shall be matured
Into a sober pleasure; when thy mind
Shall be a mansion for all lovely forms,
Thy memory be as a dwelling-place
For all sweet sounds and harmonies; oh! then,
If solitude, or fear, or pain, or grief,
Should be thy portion, with what healing thoughts

130
*Sabbie his his his to
submit completely to
nature - 135*

*Youthful lapses
her pleasure in nature will
become calm & thoughtful. 140*

Requests.

Of tender joy wilt thou remember me, she will feel grateful of her
And these my exhortations! Nor, perchance 145
If I should be where I no more can hear
Thy voice, nor catch from thy wild eyes these gleams
Of past existence—wilt thou then forget
That on the banks of this delightful stream
We stood together; and that I, so long
A worshipper of Nature, hither came
Unwearing in that service; rather say
With warmer love—oh! with far deeper zeal
Of holier love. Nor wilt thou then forget,
That after many wanderings, many years
Of absence, these steep woods and lofty cliffs,
And this green pastoral landscape, were to me
More dear, both for themselves and for thy sake

*Love with me
warmer than before
The scenes are
still fascinating
to him made for
their sake and for
the sake of his
sister.*

II. SUBSTANCE

The poet revisits the Wye after a lapse of five years. Once again he hears the murmur of the Wye, and sees the steep and lofty cliffs, the dark sycamore, the plots of cottage ground, the orchard with its unripe fruits, the hedge-rows, the pastoral farms, and columns of smoke rising from among the trees with a distant glimpse of the gipsy tents in the woods or of some hermit's cave.

A long absence does not seem to have blotted out of his memory these beautiful forms. These beautiful shapes of Nature have been a source of comfort to him, and have sustained him during his exile amid the noise and bustle of towns and cities. They have acted on him as a stimulus to kind and sympathetic deeds. They have also a profound spiritual effect on him. He owes to them that exalted mood in which he can perceive the reality above and beyond earthly things. In these moments of illumination, when all

is wrapped in a state of joy and harmony, he has an insight into the life of things. But if this were a vain belief, the poet knows at least that whenever he is oppressed by the unprofitable and meaningless business of the world he has turned to the ever-sustaining memory of the wooded landscape of the Wye for comfort.

Now once again the poet stands on the banks of the Wye, and the old picture revives in his mind. He looks forward to many pleasant thoughts to be called up by the memory of the landscape. Then he contrasts his present feelings with the past ones. In his childhood days the poet's love of Nature was simply a healthy boy's delight in outdoor life. In his boyhood days he enjoyed Nature only through the senses. At that time the sounding cataract haunted him like a passion, and his hungry soul fed itself on the beautiful colours and lovely forms of the mountains and the woods. As yet his love for Nature was untouched by intellectual interests or associations. But as he advanced in age gradually, he began to look upon Nature in a new light after his familiarity with the sufferings of mankind. At last he has discovered in Nature the existence of a living spirit—a pervasive spirit that dwells in the light of the setting sun and the round ocean, in the living air and the blue sky, and in the mind of man. He still loves the objects of Nature which appeal to his senses. He is happy to find that his purest thoughts are stimulated by Nature and her impressions received through the avenues of his sense organs. Nature has thus become the nurse, the guide, the guardian of his heart, and the soul of all his moral being.

It is quite possible that even if he had not learned this lesson from Nature he would not have allowed his warm feelings to lose their liveliness because he has the company of his dear sister on the banks of the beautiful river Wye. In her eyes he can still see gleams of pleasure which he had enjoyed five years ago. The lesson that he has learned is that Nature never betrays the heart that loves her. Nature leads us from joy to joy, and fills our minds with quietness and beauty so that evil tongues, unsympathetic judgments, the sneers of selfish men and the dreary intercourse of daily life cannot disturb our cheerful faith. He asks his sister to go on enjoying the beauties of Nature. If in future years she is afflicted with loneliness, fear or pain, she can look back to these hours of delight in the company of her brother and find comfort in the impressions of Nature stored up in her mind. If in time to come it should so happen that he is separated from her, even then she would remember that he had stood with her on the banks of the Wye, that he had revisited the place as a devoted worshipper of Nature, and that her company had enhanced the beauty of Nature in his eyes.

III. CRITICAL ESTIMATE

Introduction

The Romantic age in English literature began with the publication of *Lyrical Ballads* in 1798. Of its two poems of supreme value

the first and last in the book, Coleridge wrote the first and Wordsworth the last, an afterthought, *Lines written a few miles above Tintern Abbey, on revisiting the banks of the Wye during a tour, July 13, 1798*. This glorious afterthought is the crowning dome to the edifice that is *Lyrical Ballads*. *Tintern Abbey* stands, with the *Immortality Ode*, as the two greatest landmarks in Wordsworth's poetry. This is the first poem in which for the first time Wordsworth had felt himself in full and articulate control of his genius. He could not have written it a year before.

Occasion

"No poem of mine" Wordsworth said, "was composed under circumstances more pleasant for me to remember than this. I began it upon leaving Tintern, after crossing the Wye, and concluded it just as I was entering Bristol in the evening, after a ramble of four or five days, with my sister. Not a line of it was altered, and not any part of it written down till I reached Bristol." Surely they walked that evening into Bristol instead of straight back to Shirehampton in order that the poet might at once write it down at Cottle's and have it included in *Lyrical Ballads*. Not a line of it ever was altered, and the poem that we know today is identical with that composed on the Wye's banks—an unusual occurrence in Wordsworth's poetry.

Title

not accurate
The title of the poem is not quite accurate. If it was written, as the poet says, 'upon leaving Tintern' on July 13, the scene of its composition must have been not 'above' Tintern Abbey, but below it. In fact, it must have been written largely on board the 'small vessel' which took them back to Bristol. Much more probably, however, it was begun on the first day at Tintern when they were walking up the river towards Monmouth, and simply completed on the 13th.

"It is a curious fact that nowhere in the poem does Wordsworth mention Tintern Abbey itself, though we know that he must have admired it, for they returned from Chepstow to spend a second night there. Gilpin describes its condition; the grass in the ruins was kept mown, but it was a dwelling-place of beggars and the wretchedly poor. The river was then full of shipping, carrying coal and timber from the Forest of Dean. This also Wordsworth does not mention, though he does notice, in a footnote, to the phrase 'a soft, inland murmur' the change from tidal to non-tidal waters not far above Tintern."¹

Autobiographical Interest *(A poem of self-disclosure)*

Tintern Abbey is a poem of self-disclosure. It is *The Prelude* in little. Perhaps the way in which it most strongly resembles *The*

1. Mary Moorman, *William Wordsworth—A Biography—The Early Years 1770—1803* (Oxford University Press/London, 1957), pp. 402-3.

Prelude is in its close connection with real incidents and emotions in Wordsworth's own life. It is impossible to understand it without knowing where, when, to whom and about what he wrote it, for these personal elements are not only a part of the poem, they are what the poem is about. As Margaret Drabble puts it: "We could read *Michael* or *The Idiot Boy* or *She dwelt among the untrodden ways* without knowing anything about Wordsworth at all—though we understand them better with some knowledge—but we cannot read *Tintern Abbey* in the same way; to understand it at all, we have to pay attention to Wordsworth, and to his feelings for his sister Dorothy."

"The poem is... about the dissociation of sensibility from thought and their reintegration. Having had to abandon his childhood intuitions for the sake of thought, and having—had abandon thought when he would recover (as in his last visit) an emotional response to nature, the poet has now managed to bind his days together. to see in his childhood intuitions the origin of his moral ideas and to find both in his unified response to external scene."

Therefore Wordsworth is still, in spite of the evolution of his thought, a 'lover of the meadows and the woods', being 'well pleased to recognise, ; he concludes in the final lines of the main section of the poem,

Lovers of meadows and the woods -
In nature and the language of the sense
The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse,
The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul
Of all moral being.

Biographically, the poem is important, because it is the poet's own testimony to the change in his feelings and in his outlook since he first came that way five years ago. In this connexion F.W. Bateson observes: "In terms of Wordsworth's mental evolution the importance of 'Tintern Abbey' is that it records his discovery that 'the mighty world of eye and ear' is half created in the process of perception. The discovery had implications that have not always been realised."

Treatment of Nature

As the wordsworth first time a worshipper of nature.

It is in Tintern Abbey that we see for the first time Wordsworth as 'a worshipper of nature'. "It is not the first poem to show his sense of the importance of natural surroundings—other poems show his first-hand knowledge of country life, with its beauties and hardships. But it is *Tintern Abbey* that shows for the first time his romantic passion for nature, and in which he gives us highly emotional descriptions of the effects of the outer world upon his own inner self; this is the first poem in which he used, with deep feeling, phrases like

main theme of the poem is the relationship of man to nature and his indebtedness to her.

'a worshipper of nature', and speaks of 'the deeper zeal of holier love' that he feels for nature."³

The main theme of the poem is the poet's relationship with Nature and his indebtedness to her. In fact, we know everything about Wordsworth as a poet of Nature from *Tintern Abbey*. In it he recounts how Nature influenced him, brought him peace and tranquillity of mind even when he was in the din and bustle of the city. We see here not only Wordsworth the Nature-poet but also Wordsworth the Nature-mystic. Transcendental note is struck when Wordsworth describes how contemplation of Nature brought to him a blessed mood in which he developed an inner vision that enabled him to see into the life of things. Here again he gives an account of the different stages of development of his love for Nature—how from a healthy boy's delight in outdoor life, from a purely physical attraction for the objects of Nature, he passed on through a contact with the 'still sad music of humanity' to a realization of an all-pervading spirit in Nature. In this poem he clearly states also his faith in Nature—namely that 'Nature never did betray the heart that loved her'. "The Lines written above Tintern Abbey have become, as it were, the *locus classicus* or consecrated formula of the Wordsworthian faith."⁴

A Philosophic Poem

(Reveals his mysticism & Pantheism)

If ever there was a philosophic poem, *Tintern Abbey* is one. In it Wordsworth clearly reveals his mysticism and pantheism.

In a famous passage of the poem Wordsworth suggests that some ascertainable truth is attained by a mystical insight that transcends sense-experience :

... we are laid asleep
In body, and become a living soul :
While with an eye made quiet by the power
Of harmony, and the deep power of joy
We see into the life of things.

mysticism

"This implication is in no way lessened by the poet's suggestion that these mystical states may be due to the 'beauteous forms of Nature' :

Nor less, I trust,
To them I may have owed another gift,
Of aspect more sublime.

It has always been a tenet of Platonism and neo-Platonism, as well as a favourite doctrine of many mystics, that sensibility to natural beauty leads onward to the beauty and truth that is beyond sense."⁵

3. Margaret Drabble, *Wordsworth* (Evans Brothers Limited/London, 1968), pp. 71-72.

4. F.W.H. Myers, *Wordsworth* (Macmillan & Co., Limited/London, 1912), p. 33.

5. Melvin Radar, *Wordsworth—A Philosophical Approach* (Oxford University Press/London, 1967), pp. 156-57.

Wordsworth's pantheism is evident in a very famous passage of the poem :

... And I have felt
 A presence that disturbs me with the joy
Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
 Of something far more deeply interfused,
 Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
 And the round ocean and the living air,
 And the blue sky, and in the mind of man:
 A motion and a spirit, that impels
 All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
 And rolls through all things. Therefore am I still
 A lover of the meadows and the woods,
 And mountains ; and of all that we behold
 From this green earth ; of all the mighty world
 Of eye and ear,—both what they half create
 And what perceive ; well pleased to recognize
 In nature and the language of the sense
 The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse,
 The quite, the guardian of my heart, and soul
 Of all my moral being.

"Nature meant a
 world soul which
 includes humanity"

"At the time of composing *Tintern Abbey* Wordsworth was a pantheist, or at least had pantheistic leanings. . . In its deeper significance, nature meant for him a world soul that includes humanity. It is a mistake to sever it from the language of the sense because it is one spirit embracing all things and appearing both within and outside man. The inner characteristics of nature can be known through the ecstasy, just as its other characteristics can be known through perceptions. The 'soul of all my moral being' should be taken to mean the expression in man of the moral life of nature, conveyed sensuously when we listen to the language of the sense, and supersensuously when the body is laid to sleep and we see into nature's inner self."⁶

Poetry not subordinated to Philosophy -

In *Tintern Abbey* Wordsworth's philosophy has been stated, but nowhere has poetry been subordinated to philosophy. In fact, the claims of poetry and philosophy have been harmonised. The poem has thereby acquired a dignity of its own.

A Difficult Poem

Tintern Abbey is a difficult poem to understand even with all the information that we possess about what may have been happening in Wordsworth's mind on July 13, 1798. To Keats it seemed a poem full of dark passages. As he put it : "I compare human life to a large Mansion of Many Apartments, two of which I can only describe, the doors of the rest being as yet shut upon me—The first we step into we call the infant or thoughtless Chamber, in which we

6. Melvin Radar, *Wordsworth—A Philosophical Approach* (Oxford University Press/London, 1967), p. 158.

1st. Chamber of Thoughtless Chamber - we don't think.
 2nd. Chamber of Maiden Thought.
 Pleasant wonders - we don't want to leave it.

TINTERN ABBEY

253.

remain as long as we do not think—We remain there a long while, and notwithstanding the doors of the second Chamber remain wide open, showing a bright appearance, we care not to hasten to it; but are at length imperceptibly impelled by the awakening of the thinking principle—within us—We no sooner get into the second Chamber, which I shall call the Chamber of Maiden—Thought, than we become intoxicated with the light and the atmosphere, we see nothing but pleasant wonders, and think of delaying there for ever in delight: However among the effects this breathing is father of is that tremendous one of sharpening one's vision into the heart and nature of Man—of convincing one's nerves that the World is full of Misery and Heartbreak, Pain, Sickness and Oppression—whereby This Chamber of Maiden Thought becomes gradually darken'd and at the same time on all sides of it many doors are set open—but all dark—all leading to dark passages—We see not the balance of good and evil. We are in a Mist—We are now in that state—We feel the 'burden of the Mystery'. To this point was Wordsworth come, as far as I can conceive when he wrote 'Tintern Abbey' and it seems to me that his Genius is explorative of those dark Passages." *Acals*

A close examination of the poem shows that in it Wordsworth was not concerned with offering the final poetic statement of a fully-formed philosophical view of life and the universe, unlike Coleridge, who, as Keats knew, was 'incapable of remaining content with half-knowledge'. He was primarily concerned with expressing the complex totality of a mood which included both elements of knowledge and of half-knowledge. As Albert S. Gerard puts it: "To knowledge belong his sensory apprehension of nature, the healing power of his memory of nature, his past and Dorothy's present emotional involvement in nature. To half-knowledge belong his speculations on the actual content of his mystical moods and the relationship of these moods with nature, and his perplexity regarding the balance of loss and gain in his own evolution. This division accounts for the dialectical oscillation which drives Wordsworth to statements of sublimity only to stress their hypothetical character immediately afterwards."

A Poem to Dorothy

Like the *Lucy* poems, *Tintern Abbey* is personal in feeling, but unlike them it is quite openly and specifically so, and says exactly what and whom it is being personal about. Instead of addressing an unknown girl named Lucy, it addresses 'my dear, dear sister'. Indeed, *Tintern Abbey* is Wordsworth's poem to Dorothy in the same way as *The Prelude* is his poem to Coleridge.

"It is no accident that 'Tintern Abbey' ends with the famous tribute to Dorothy Wordsworth. In this 'dear, dear Sister' Wordsworth seemed to have found the resolution of his psychological contradictions. She was his link with humanity, the one human being from whom he had no secrets or reservations, and she was also at this time at just the same stage of ecstatic connoisseurship of natural beauty that he had looked back to so regretfully in his own adolescence."

in thy voice I catch
The language of my former heart. . . .

If anything Dorothy's sense of the picturesque was even finer than William's had been. The first entry in the Alfoxden Journal, for 20 January 1798, is curiously similar in its conscious precision to *An Evening Walk*, though the visual details are even more brilliant :

The green paths down the hill-sides are channels for streams. The young wheat is streaked by silver lines of water running between the ridges, the sheep are gathered together on the slopes. After the wet dark days, the country seems more populous. It peoples itself in the sunbeams. . . . The slanting woods of an unvarying brown, showing the light through the thin net-work of their upper boughs. Upon the highest ridge of that round hill covered with planted oaks, the shafts of the trees show in the light like the columns of a ruin.

It is all perhaps a little too sophisticated, but in its own way it could hardly be better done. The Alfoxden Journal ends on 22 May—seven weeks before the walking tour in South Wales which took the Wordsworths to Tintern; and it retains to the end a much greater interest the landscape than in William.

There is no hint of unsisterly feelings. On William's side too there is nothing for the most determined scandal-monger to get hold of before 'Tintern Abbey'. No doubt the progress to mutual infatuation was gradual and unconscious. But it had certainly begun, for Wordsworth at any rate, by July 1798, and directly or indirectly most of Wordsworth's poems written in the years immediately following seem to be coloured by it."

Style and Language *(Employed double-exposure technique?)*

In *Tintern Abbey* Wordsworth has employed the double-exposure technique. As he is interested in the stages of growth, he often juxtaposes two widely separated periods of time in such a way that we are made dramatically conscious of the degree of growth that has taken place between Stage One and Stage Two. It resembles the effect that might be produced by our seeing a double exposure on photographic film, where the same person appears in the same setting, except that ten years have elapsed between exposures. In the present poem the light in the eyes of his sister seems to reflect for the poet the very set of mind with which, five years before, he had exulted over the beauties of the landscape around the river Wye. As he overlooks the scene once more, with the mental landscape of the past still in his purview, he is made doubly aware of a sense of loss and a sense of compensation greater than the loss. It is the collocation of two separate 'spots of time' which dramatizes for him (and for us) the degree and kind of his growth in the intervening

period. It is the technique of double exposure which gives dramatic life to this philosophic lyric.

Tintern Abbey is quite unlike both lyrics and ballads in style, for its language is not simple by any standards. In it Wordsworth has not used the language of 'the middle and lower classes of society'. Words like 'elevated', 'sublime', 'interfused', 'genial', 'ecstasy', and 'zeal' are certainly not used by the Cumberland shepherd in his daily life. The syntax, too, is as far removed from ordinary conversation as the actual words. In *Tintern Abbey* we see for the first time what is often labelled the 'Miltonic' side of Wordsworth—the long, involved sentences, the lofty emotions, the grand manner. "Here, for the first time practically, Wordsworth speaks the language that he was afterwards to speak in prose and in verse, in the tract on the Convention of Cintra as well as in *The Prelude* and *The Excursion*, in private letters and even in domestic conversation. With its long sentences, its involved grammar and its polysyllabic vocabulary it was a form of discourse that abandoned all pretence to being the poetry of the people. But it was a style that came much more easily to Wordsworth, sometimes indeed too easily, and it clearly expressed something fundamental in him that had hitherto been denied an outlet."⁸

Conclusion

"Clearly, when he wrote *Tintern Abbey*, Wordsworth was aiming at something quite unlike the aims fulfilled in a poem like, *Michael* or *The Idiot Boy*. It does not follow from this, however, that because *Tintern Abbey* is good, all the other poems must be bad and that the aims expressed in the *Preface* must be mistaken. The other poems are good, and in some ways they are more completely successful than *Tintern Abbey*, which has its weak moments (what, for instance, are hermits—those Gothic trappings—doing in line 122) and which points forward not only to the grand achievement of *The Prelude*, but also to some of the worst pseudo-poetic sublimities of Wordsworth's middle and old age. *Tintern Abbey* is not good at the expense of other poems in the book; it is good in quite a different way."⁹

IV. OPINIONS OF CRITICS

1. This is the first poem in which Wordsworth's genius finds full expression: the blank verse, low-toned and familiar yet impassioned, moves with a sureness and inevitable ease from phase to phase of this mood. It has the quiet pulse, suggesting 'central peace', which is left under all his great poetry. From his own significant comment we learn that he had in mind an elaborate literary

8. F.W. Bateson, *Wordsworth—A Re-interpretation* (Longmans, Green & Co. Ltd./London, 1954), pp. 142-43.

9. Margaret Drabble, *Wordsworth* (Evans Brothers Limited/London, 1968), pp. 75-76.

form : I have not ventured to call this Poem an Ode ; but it was written with a hope that in the transitions and the impassioned music of the versification, would be found the principal requisites of that species of composition. Yet he composed it, as he said, on that four-days ramble from Tintern to Bristol, the last twenty lines being completed as he walked down the hill from Clifton. Not a word of it was altered and not any of it written down till he reached Bristol.

It is a piece of highly accomplished verse, conceived and composed in a full flood of creative activity. It opens the new phase in his poetic life, which is recorded in the second volume of the *Lyrical Ballads*, in the *Poems* in two volumes of 1807, and in the first version of *The Prelude*—that short, glorious period of creation when, at the height of his powers, he drew upon the manifold resources of his literary experience, as well as upon the stored riches of his inner life.

—Helen Darbishire

2. The notion that nature speaks with 'two voices' fits the actual wording of *Tintern Abbey* perfectly. To the 'beauteous forms' of outward experience Wordsworth owes 'sensations sweet, Felt in the blood, and felt along the heart.' The language here is strikingly materialistic. But to these same beauteous forms he owes 'another gift, Of aspect more sublime'. This gift springs from an *inward* impulse (since 'the affections' not the senses, 'gently lead us on'). It is the 'privilege' of nature (here personified)

to lead
From joy to joy : for she can so inform
The mind that is within us, so impress
With quietness and beauty, and so feed
With lofty thoughts.

that the whole moral life is lifted up and transformed. This personification seems perfectly natural, since nature is represented as a 'guide' that informs the mind directly as well as impresses the senses. Or, shifting the metaphor, nature is depicted as a 'nurse' that feeds the soul with 'lofty thought' :

The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse,
The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul
Of all my moral being.

Thus nature works both outside and inside the mind.

This interpretation is in harmony with the 1805 version of *The Prelude*, in which Wordsworth speaks of the poetic faculty as 'an Element of Nature's *inner self*'. In another passage he expresses the same conception :

Also, about this time did I receive
Convictions still more strong than heretofore,
Not only that the *inner frame* is good,

And graciously composed, but that, no less,
Nature for all conditions wants not power
 To consecrate, if we have eyes to see,
 The *outside* of her creatures, and to breathe
 Grandeur upon the very humblest face
 Of human life.

The implication is that nature has both an 'outside' and an 'inner frame'.

The characteristics of nature can therefore be ascertained by probing into the mind as well as by observing the outer world.

In the light of this conception of nature there is no contradiction in supposing that there are inner transcendental impulses which work in harmony with quite different sensory factors. It is this notion of nature, and of the co-working of the senses and the intuitive faculties, that pervades Wordsworth's greatest poetry. It is this notion that makes him proclaim

How exquisitely the individual Mind
 to the external World
 Is fitted :—and how exquisitely, too
 The external World is fitted to the Mind.

With this interpretation in mind, we can explain all of *Tintern Abbey*, including the insight into the life of things when the body is laid asleep.

—Melvin Rader

3. The logical contradication which is at the heart of "Tintern Abbey" conceals a confession of failure. But the poem does not read like a confession of failure. Rhetorically it is superbly assured and persuasive. With the exception of the fragmentary prologue to *The Recluse* Wordsworth had written nothing possessing a similar declamatory fervour since the address to Liberty at the end of *Descriptive Sketches*. That had been intended as the introduction to a career that never eventuated—that of the revolutionary publicist. And its ultimate inspiration had been Annettee's love and belief in him and the talks and walks with Beaupuy. "Tintern Abbey" was also an introduction, but this time to his career as the prophet of nature. Here, for the first time practically, Wordsworth speaks the language that he was afterwards to speak in prose and in verse, in the tract on the Convention of Cintra as well as in *The Prelude* and *The Excursion*, in private letters and even in domestic conversation. With its long sentences, its involved grammar and its polysyllabic vocabulary it was a form of discourse that abandoned all pretence to being the poetry of the people. But it was a style that came much more easily to Wordsworth, sometimes indeed too easily, and it clearly expressed something fundamental in him that had hitherto been denied an outlet. Formally these elaborate monologues seem to derive from Coleridge, who practised a similar art both in verse and in conversation. Coleridge had now taken the place of Beaupuy. And the place of Annettee as ultimate inspirer was taken by a brunette of twenty-

six, whose 'wild eyes' now drove Annette's out of Wordsworth's head as effectually as Annette had displayed Mary of Esthwaite some six years ago. The new love—it is the only word that can be used—was his sister Dorothy.

—F.W. Bateson

4. The occasion of the poem is a visit to the Wye, already visited five years before : this gives rise to reflections on the significance that the landscape has had for him in the interval. Wordsworth first restates his moral doctrine : the memory of this beautiful scene has been not only calming and restorative, but has aroused almost unnoticed sensations of pleasure, which have had their results in impulses of kindness and love. This seems truer and more adequate than saying that a wood in spring can teach you all about ethics. But he has also owed to these recollections another and sublimer gift :

—that blessed mood,
In which the burthen of the mystery,
In which the heavy and the weary weight
Of all this unintelligible world,
Is lightened :—that serene and blessed mood,
In which the affections gently lead us on,—
Until, the breath of this corporeal frame
And even the motion of our human blood
Almost suspended, we are laid asleep
In body, and become a living soul.

Wordsworth does not explain or defend this doctrine ; he merely states it as experience, in verse of such serene loveliness that it carries with it its own guarantee of authenticity. This is the part of the Wordsworthian religion that no change in the intellectual concept of nature is likely to invalidate, and that *pace* Mr. Aldous Huxley, can be as active in tropical jungles as in the dales of Westmorland. However, Wordsworth does not stop here : he goes on to trace the stages through which his response to nature has passed. First the "glad animal movements", the mainly muscular pleasures of the boyhood ; then, in youth, the purely visual delight in natural beauty,

That had no need of a remoter charm,
By thought supplied, nor any interest
Unborrowed from the eye :

—then in maturity the development of a sense, which is only the full realization of something obscurely experienced all along—

—a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused,
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
And the round ocean and the living air,
And the blue sky and in the mind of man :
A motion and a spirit, that impels
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
And rolls through all things.

This is a profound and undoctrinal pantheism, unfettered by moral accretions at a more superficial level. Wordsworth felt obliged to play it down in later life, in the interests of orthodoxy ; and others have felt bound to abandon it in the face of the scientific 'neutralization of nature'. But it remained after all the most deeply based of all Wordsworth's experiences ; it is after all wholly independent of any particular belief about the nature of the physical world, even of any particular culture ; and it is likely, therefore, to remain an important part of modern religious experience. —**Graham Hough**

5. It is the earliest definition of Wordsworth's philosophy of nature, and it is the best. Wordsworth has described what Nature meant to him as a boy and as a youth ; but now the 'glad animal movements' of the first age and the passionate appetites and instinctive sympathies of the second age are no more. But there is 'abundant recompense'—

For I have learned
To look on nature, not as in the hour
Of thoughtless youth ; but hearing often times
The still, sad music of humanity,
Nor harsh nor grating, though of ample power
To chasten and subdue. And I have felt
A presence that disturbs me with the joy
Of elevated thoughts ; a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused,
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
And the round ocean and the living air,
And the blue sky and in the mind of man :
A motion and a spirit, that impels
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
And rolls through all things. Therefore am I still
A lover of the meadows and the woods,
And mountains ; and of all that we behold
From this green earth ; of all the mighty world
Of eye, and ear,—both what they half create,
And what perceive ; well pleased to recognize
In nature and the language of the sense
The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse,
The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul
Of all my moral being.

What shall we say of this philosophy today ? Let us recognize in the first place that it is not merely mystical emotionalism.

It is objective ; it is based on a psychological theory, the most empirical of its day. It is realistic ; the still sad music of humanity is often heard, with chastening effect. It is not strictly pantheistic ; nature is not worshipped as an entity ; the mighty world of eye and ear is without ; manifesting the same sublime sense, but co-existent, not co-incident, with the mind of man ; and though the same im-

pulse animates all objects of all thought, the mind rises above the objects it contemplates, to the creation of a moral being, a soul.

But this philosophy is humanistic. It is the greatest exaltation of the mind of man that has ever been conceived. No wonder Blake found it blasphemous ; for Wordsworth so elevates the human mind, that he leaves no room for a personal God.

—Herbert Read

6. The poem is, in other words, about the dissociation of sensibility from thought and their reintegration. Having had to abandon his childhood intuitions for the sake of thought, and having had to abandon thought when he would recover (as in his last visit), an emotional response to nature, the poet has now managed to bind his days together, to see in his childhood intuitions the origin of his moral ideas and to find both in his unified response to the external scene. "Therefore" he is "still", in spite of the evolution of his thought. "A lover of the meadows and the woods", being "well pleased to recognize" he concludes in the final lines of the main section,

In nature and the language of the sense,
The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse,
The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul
Of all my moral being.

We should not suppose, however, that these lines are the climax of the poem, and the final passage in which the poet turns to his sister a mere postscript. If this were so, the original perception would have been completely formulated and the poem would be the equivalent of a true or false statement. The lines offer instead the partial articulation of a deeper, more mysterious perception which has now opened out from the first—a perception of a benevolent working of things which, if we fit our life into it, roots our most sophisticated idea in our most primitive impulse, uniting youth with age, the external with the internal sense with idea, and matter with spirit.

It is a way of expressing what formulation has left unexpressed that the poet makes the concretely dramatic movement by which he turns upon his sister the love and joy with which the perception fills him, and the vision which he carries over from the landscape. Now he sees in her what he once was, and sees in the difference between them what she shall be. He has transforming vision of her as a child of nature blessed in all the stages of her life ; and by identifying her future memory of this visit with his own and with his present memory of his last visit, he sees in the different stages of their development along the same line the rhythm and harmony of things. All this comes together in the graceful conclusion of the poem, where the poet turns his eyes back to the landscape :

Nor wilt thou then forget,
That after many wanderings, many years
Of absence, these steep woods and lofty cliffs,
And this green pastoral landscape, were to me
More dear, both for themselves and for thy sake!

thus connecting in one concrete vision himself, his sister and the landscape, their love for each other and for nature, nature's love for them, and past, present and future, time and timelessness. It is just because the poet now finds all this on returning to his original view of the landscape that we can measure the distance he has come, his gain in perception.

—Robert Langbaum

7. Biographically, *Tintern Abbey* is important, because it is Wordsworth's own testimony to the change in his feelings and in his outlook since he first came that way five years before. As he looked again on the 'steep woods and lofty banks' of the Wye he saw the image of himself as he was then, flinging himself into delight in nature as though he were slaking an intolerable thirst ; seeking in her a refuge from his tormenting mental conflict, and, because his need was so violent, his enjoyment was—or so he thought afterwards entirely sensuous and devoid of that deeper pleasure 'by thought supplied' :

I cannot paint
What then I was. The sounding cataract
Haunted me like a passion : the tall rock,
The mountain, and the deep and gloomy wood,
Their colours and their forms, were then to me
An appetite ; a feeling and a love,
That had no need of a remoter charm,
By thought supplied, nor any interest
Unborrowed from the eye.

But now

That time is past,
And all its aching joys are now no more,
And all its dizzy raptures.

The loss, however, had been compensated by 'other gifts' more precious. Of these, he dwells particularly on two : one, his new and gentler outlook on the tragedy of humanity ; the other, that frequent sense of the presence in him and around him of a universal, illimitable spirit, vague indeed in its definition, but sublime in its grand and all-embracing movement, of which he had been conscious in boyhood, but of which his pre-occupation with human problems had for a time deprived him :

For I have learned
To look on nature, not as in the hour
Of thoughtless youth; but hearing oftentimes
The still, sad music of humanity,
Nor harsh nor grating, though of ample power
To chasten and subdue. And I have felt

.....
A motion and a spirit, that impels
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
And rolls through all things.

In those five years in fact Wordsworth had learnt that it was not necessary to divorce nature and humanity in his affections, and that his deepest intuitions which he had known in boyhood, of the unity of all life in one joyous being, were still valid.

And so his eyes came to rest at last on that being who had been the chief human agent in the reconciling work, and the end of the poem is a thanksgiving and a prayer for Dorothy.

—Mary Moorman

8. What he has to tell us of the workings of his mind is neither simple nor easy to understand ; his attitudes towards nature and its influences on man are extremely complicated, and have been long and laboriously discussed from every possible standpoint. Critics have seen in his poetry all kinds of religious and philosophical beliefs, and have argued fiercely about whether he is a Pantheist or a Platonist, a Christian nature mystic or an atheist or a follower of Hartley or a follower of Godwin or a follower of Rousseau. The truth is that he is a little bit of all these things, and he certainly does not hold and stick to any one rigid code or system of belief ; his many beliefs cannot possibly be reduced to any one simple message, or even to any one complicated message. It might be worth trying to list some of the many, various, and not wholly consistent attitudes to nature that can be found in this one poem ; such a list will at least give some impression of the mixed contents of his mind. In this poem, we see :

1. Nature as Comforter. (In absence, in sorrow, in the ugly rush of city life ; see poems like *The Daffodils*.)

2. Nature as a doorway into a state of visionary trance-like insight. (The state in which, while contemplating nature, we are laid asleep in body, and become a 'living soul' : a state of 'wise passiveness'.)

3. Nature as the object of appetite, as the object of a passion for the picturesque ; the nature of the ardent sightseer. (As nature was to Wordsworth in 1793, and when he went on his tour of the Alps.)

4. Nature as a source of and scene for animal pleasures, such as skating, riding, fishing, walking.

5. Nature as the home of the spirit of the world, or as the physical embodiment of God himself.

6. Nature as the union or meeting point of the inner and outer worlds. (The eye and ear both perceive and create what they sense. Wordsworth says ; one of his most difficult concepts is his idea that the boundary between the outer world of nature and the inner world of the mind is a shifting boundary, not a fixed one.)

7. Nature as the source of and guide to human morality. (Compare with episodes from *The Prelude* about the stolen boat and the birds stolen from snares.)

8. Nature as a source of simple joy and pleasure.

All these different attitudes to nature occur in the poem, in roughly the order that I have given them ; then, in the last twenty lines, the poem goes back to its beginning, and comes full circle, for it ends with notion 10, the idea of nature as comforter. He ends by telling his sister that, in times to come :

if solitude, or fear, or pain, or grief,
Should be thy portion, with what healing thoughts
Of tender joy wilt thou remember me
And these my exhortations !

Nature is called upon to comfort his sister in the sorrows of life that she may in the future be called upon to endure ; this was not to be a mere pious wish, for poor Dorothy was to have more than her fair share of pain and grief, and spent over twenty years in a wheel-chair, ill in body and mind, and in those years nature was almost her only comfort.

Making a list of Wordsworth's attitudes in this way does no more, of course, than show how difficult it is to turn his views into a clear system or philosophy. The categories overlap. Some of them are extremely simple—nearly everyone, for instance, uses the world of nature as a source of physical enjoyment, and as a source of beauty and comfort. Some of them, on the other hand, are extremely abstruse, and quite impossible to put into simple terms ; they are moreover very peculiarly his own, and very few people would agree with all his varying ideas. Indeed, he does not agree with all his own ideas all the time : his views changed as his moods and experiences changed.

—Margaret Drabble

9. The misgivings and the ultimate fear of mortality are part of the poem because of Wordsworth's insistence upon autobiographical honesty. They help to make *Tintern Abbey* the major testament it is, for through them the poem convinces us it has earned the heights upon which it moves. The consoling story of a natural growth that tests the soul, teaches it generosity, and accepts its love becomes finally what Wallace Stevens in *The Rock* calls "a cure of the ground and of ourselves, in the predicate that there is nothing else." This predicate of nakedness is a sublime act of honesty, and prepares us for the Wordsworth who is the first poet ever to present our human condition in its naturalistic truth, vulnerable and dignified, and irreducible, not to be explained away in any terms, theological or analytical, but to be accepted as what it is. The mind, knowing only itself and Nature, but remembering a time when Nature gave it direct joy, and having remoter memories of an earlier time when it knew itself only in union with Nature, is able to turn back through memory for a faith that at last gives courage and a love for others.

Blake did not believe in the goodness of the natural heart, and Coleridge could neither believe in nor deny it, but Wordsworth brings its possibility as truth alive into our hearts, as he did into the heart of Keats. There are greater Romantic poems than *Tintern*

Abbey, but they surpass it as vision or rhetoric, not as consolation. No poem, unless it be *The Old Cumberland Beggar*, humanizes us more.

—Harold Bloom

10. . . .the dynamic nucleus which gives the poem its impetus is of course perplexity. Wordsworth had reached the age when a man pauses to reckon up his losses and his gains for the first time. What his losses were was quite clear to him : he had lost the intimate emotional relationship with nature that was his five years before. The gains were less obvious, for the 'other gifts' twice mentioned in the poem are of a less ascertainable nature, dealing as they do with metaphysical intuitions. Twice in the course of the poem, Wordsworth's inspiration gathers force and soars to mystical heights. But although his poetic eloquence testifies to the intensity of the accompanying emotion, Wordsworth's intellectual honesty prevents him from presenting as fact what is only conjectural. Hence the perplexity. For if the 'other gifts' are but vain belief, the loss, obviously is total and irrecoverable.

It seems that the painstaking procedures of close textual analysis do little more than confirm Keats's flash of sympathetic insight in a passage which it is necessary to quote in full :

I compare human life to a large Mansion of Many Apartments, two of which I can only describe, the doors of the rest being as yet shut upon me—The first we step into we call the infant or thoughtless Chamber, in which we remain as long as we do not think—We remain there a long while, and notwithstanding the doors of the second Chamber remain wide open, showing a bright appearance, we care not to hasten to it ; but are at length imperceptibly impelled by the awakening of the thinking principle—within us—we no sooner get into the second Chamber, which I call the Chamber of Maiden-Thought, than we become intoxicated with the light and the atmosphere, we see nothing but pleasant wonders, and think of delaying there for ever in delight : However among the effects this breathing is father of is that tremendous one of sharpening one's vision into the heart and nature of Man—of convincing one's nerves that the World is full of Misery and Heartbreak, Pain, Sickness and oppression—whereby this Chamber of Maiden. Thought becomes gradually darkens and at the same time on all sides of it many doors are set open—but all dark—all leading to dark passages—We see not the balance of good and evil. We are in a Mist—We are now in that state—We feel the 'burden of the Mystery'. To this point was Wordsworth come, as far as I can conceive when he wrote 'Tintern Abbey', and it seems to me that his Genius is explorative of those dark Passages.

Yet, there is something that should be added to Keats's observation. For as we reread the first lines of stanza V—'Nor perchance, If I were not thus taught, should I the more/Suffer my genial spirits to decay'—we are struck by a note that anticipates later stages in the poet's development. The way the sentence is turned is suggestive of Wordsworth's stern determination—while contemplating his

greatest loss—not to give himself up to the annihilating power of his sad perplexity. Faced with a vital dilemma—either to lose his grasp of the actual, or to admit the vanity of his highest intuitions—it is by an act of the will based on certain knowledge that Wordsworth decides to seek the meaning which his experience, past and present, holds for the future.

Norman Lacey has expressed his surprise that Wordsworth 'did not realize clearly that he was most certainly in possession of the truth when he was "*laid asleep in body*"—in other words, that his mystical experiences were the only starting point for all truth insight "into the life of things" and that he must at all costs pin his faith to *them*, and not to the language of the sense'. There may be some truth in this view, although the symbolic significance inherent in the Wye landscape as perceived by the poet's senses does point to intimations of a living cosmic unity.

But the fact remains that we find no attempt, within the poem, at reconciling insight and sensation on the *ideational level*. Nor is there, we must not, any explicit condemnation of the nearly pantheistic utterances of the sublime passages, as we find in Coleridge's 'The Eolian Harp'. This is conclusive proof that Wordsworth was not concerned with offering the final poetic statement of a fully-formed philosophical view of life and the universe, unlike Coleridge, who, as Keats knew, was 'incapable of remaining content with half knowledge'. Wordsworth was first and foremost concerned with expressing the complex totality of a mood which included both elements of knowledge and of half-knowledge.

To knowledge belong his sensory apprehension of nature, the healing power of his memory of nature, his past and Dorothy's present emotional involvement in nature. To half-knowledge belong his speculations on the actual content of his mystical moods and the relationships of these moods with nature, and his perplexity regarding the balance of loss and gain in his own evolution. This division accounts for the dialectical oscillation which drives Wordsworth to statements of sublimity only to stress their hypothetical character immediately afterwards.

But while the dominating mood of the greater part of 'Tintern Abbey' is one of perplexity, it was not in the nature of Wordsworth to rest satisfied with a depiction, however, accurate and subtle, of his ambiguous predicament at the moment of writing. Indeed, this ambiguity was something that he wanted to overcome. His final concern, therefore, was with finding, in the lessons of the past and the present, some experiential certainty that might put his mind to rest by supplying a firm basis for his future development. What emerges at the outset of a reflective process remarkable both for his honesty and its profundity, is the confidence expressed in the lines, 'Knowing that Nature never did betray'. 'The heart that loved her', where the verb 'knowing' carries the full force of absolute conviction. This certainty, this complete assurance of the benevolence of nature, which

is the uncontrovertible conclusion to be drawn from his past, is also foundation for his 'hope' and his 'trust' and his determination to uphold his 'genial spirits' and his 'cheerful' faith'. In which direction the will based on such knowledge is going to drive him is obliquely suggested in the concluding lines of the poem. As Miss Nitchie has observed, the last sentence 'echoes the beginning and completes the circle of the poem'. But it is significant that Wordsworth chose to recall two of the symbolic features of the Wye landscape : the oneness of its green hue and the ascending movement of the 'steep and lofty cliffs'.

—Albert S. Gerard

V. NOTES

1. **Five years have past**—Five years have passed since the poet paid the first visit to Tintern Abbey.

4. **With a soft inland murmur**—The poet hears the murmuring sound of the waters because the Wye is not affected by the tides a few miles above Tintern. Cf. Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, XIX :

There twice a day Severn fills ;
The salt sea-water passes by,
And hushes half the babbling Wye
And makes a silence in the hills

.....
The tide flows down, the wave again
Is vocal in its wooded walls.

5-22. Bernard Groom has offered the following comment on this passage :

Wordsworth, who was a systematic student of landscape, seems to have written this description with an eye to the principles of that form of beauty. First, the landscape is harmonious—varied but without abrupt transitions ; earth and sky are wrapt in the same tranquillity (Lines 7-8) ; the green of the orchards merges into that of the woods (Lines 13-14) ; the green of the landscape even invades the pastoral farms (Lines 16-17). Secondly, there is *distance* seen or felt : the cliffs suggest deeper seclusion, the Wye murmurs of its mountain source. Thirdly, there is *sentiment*, suitable to the tranquillity of the scene, in the silent 'wreaths of smoke'. (Lines 17-18.)

7-8. **Connect/The landscape with the quiet of the sky**—The steep rocks lead one's eyes upwards with a gradation of colour and form from the bright hues and distinct outlines of the landscape to the more restful colouring and expanse of the sky. "Wordsworth seems to have been always deeply impressed by the solitary and silent grandeur of mountain heights—although to the lover of Switzerland he appears to have scarcely realized the true grandeur of the Alps."

—Cotterill

11. **Orchard-tufts**—Fruit-gardens in the distance looked like tufts of feathers. Cf. *The Green Linnet* :

Amid yon tuft of hazel trees.

13-14. **Lose themselves/'Mid' groves and copses**—As the fruits are unripe and green, the fruit-trees lose their identity and merge with other green trees.

15. **Hedge-rows**—Rows of shrubs or small trees serving as a fence.

15-16. **Little lines/Of sportive wood run wild**—The hedge-rows have playfully spread themselves in lines. Cf. *Excursion*, Book I, lines 453-454 :

It was a plot
Of garden ground run wild.

18-22. Albert S. Gerard offers the following comment on this passage :

In a way, this intimation of human presence brings the landscape description to a climax. Admittedly, as F.W. Bateson rightly comments, 'hermits were one of the conventional properties of late eighteenth-century landscape, and their presence guaranteed the aesthetic, non-documentary quality of the picture'. So were gypsies. But thinking back on the beggar woman in 'An Evening Walk', on 'The Female Vagrant', on 'The Mad Mother', we remember what Mary Moorman has called Wordsworth's 'natural attraction to the ragged vagrant', which lifts the motif above the level of mere literary convention and turns the character into an emblem of suffering mankind. Within the framework of the poem, the vagrants announce 'the still sad music of humanity'. And as we remember 'The Old Cumberland Beggar' or 'Resolution and Independence', it becomes clear that Wordsworth has endowed the conventional eighteenth-century hermit with a significance that goes beyond the mere picturesque : his solitaries exemplify the highest form of contemplation and wisdom ; they are man stripped of all inessentials, living in intimate communion with nature. Thus the Hermit in his cave carries a faint suggestion of the human ideal towards which Wordsworth was groping at the time, and which he was to define with greater assurance in later poems.

23. **These beauteous forms**—Richard J. Onorato observes :

The wishful quality of his recollections of "these beauteous forms" tells us what they have been to him in the interim since his last visit. How often, Wordsworth says, his spirit has turned to the Sylvan Wye and these beauteous forms when, "amid the many shapes of joyless daylight," his heart has been oppressed by "the fever of the world". That is, the beauteous forms are a landscape within Wordsworth's mind ; and Wordsworth withdraws into his own mind.

and experiences there tranquil restoration. What Wordsworth withdraws from, as he characterizes it, is an impressively unpleasant reality. If by this he means the city, we can imagine that a place so intolerable to him, with its dreary style of life, should be rejected, especially with the rural alternative presented so attractively; but if he means, as he seems to, external reality too, the rejection of it in favour of something withdrawn and inner is a potential psychic disaster.

27. **Hours of weariness**—The period of darkness and moral crisis.

27. **Sensations sweet**—The sweet memory of those beautiful scenes thrilled his senses.

30. **With tranquil restoration**—Restoring to his mind peace and quiet happiness.

30-31. **Feelings too/Of unremembered pleasure**—The pleasurable feelings excited by a beautiful scene unconsciously influence our life even though we forget their occasion. Cf. *The Prelude*, Book II, 315-318 :

...but that the soul,
Remembering how she felt, but what she felt
Remembering not, retains an obscure sense
Of possible sublimity. . .

37—49. This is a famous passage of the poem. Following are the important critical opinions on it :

(a) The three lines which follow the introductory half-line build up the sense of a crushing burden with their slow movement, their ponderous repetition of the awkward phrase 'In which' and the dragging, encumbering effect of words like, 'weary weight' and 'unintelligible'. With the beginning of the new line, the burden is removed and the verse moves more freely—still slowly, but gently and without effort. Then, with the word 'Until', we are required, as it were, to hold our breath while the long interposed clause which follows slowly unwinds itself, slowing the verse down gradually to a virtual standstill at 'suspended'; so that 'we are laid asleep in body' simply records the trance-like state which the verse itself has achieved. With the imprisoning body spellbound, the sudden vigour of 'and become a living soul' announces the release of the non-corporeal faculties to the state of perceptive clarity recorded in :

We see into the life of things.

We are not, as we might have been in a different context, provoked into asking what Wordsworth means by 'seeing into the life of things'. Through the medium of the verse itself, Wordsworth has re-enacted for us the sequence of experience which has brought him to this state, so that we know, by demonstration, what that state is. We are not concerned to know *what* he sees; the point of the verse

is to enable us to follow the process which makes the state possible. Wordsworth himself, indeed, is disarmingly frank in expressing his doubts about what he actually sees, for the line continues :

If this
Be but a vain belief, yet, oh ! etc. —R.O.C. Winkler

(b) This is not mysticism but, rather, a state of aesthetic contemplation. All contemplation of objects except the aesthetic is essentially practical, and so directed toward personal ends. The poet's genius frees contemplation from the drive of the will, and consequently the poet is able to see with a quiet eye. To see into the life of things is to see things for themselves and not their potential use. The poet attains to this state through memories of Nature's presence, which give a quietness that is a blessed mood, one in which the object world becomes near and familiar, and ceases to be a burden. The best analogue is the difference we feel in the presence of a stranger or a good friend. From this serenity the affections lead us on to the highest kind of naturalistic contemplation, when we cease to *have* our bodies, but *are* our bodies, and so are "laid asleep/In body, and become a living soul." —Harold Bloom

37. **Blessed mood**—A trance-like state which comes as a blessing.

40. **This unintelligible world**—The world is mysterious because its significance is not understood. Cf. *Ode on Intimations of Immortality*, 148-49 :

Blank misgivings of a Creature
Moving about in worlds not realised.

46. **A living soul**—"The 'living soul', which is in some way within and beneath the ordinary self, and the permanent 'life of things' seem to him to coalesce by the sensation of an inner seeing. In describing that state, the poet maintains only the minimal sense of subject and object that language forces upon any account of what has happened to one, even that of the coalescence of subject and object. There is consciousness without self-consciousness."

—Richard J. Onorato

47-48. **An eye made quiet by the power/Of harmony**—Mental vision is calmed by the perception of the unity of Nature. Cf. *A Poet's Epitaph*, 45-52 :

The outward shows of sky and earth,
Of hill and valley, he has viewed ;
And impulses of deeper birth
Have come to him in solitude.
In common things that round us lie
Some random truths he can impart,—
The harvest of a quiet eye
That broods and sleeps on his own heart.

49. **We see into the life of things**—"Seeing into the life of things seems to be a suspension of the breath and the blood because of the extinction of the usual bodily sense of the one-who-sees, of the ordinary conscious self that has seen all too clearly 'this unintelligible world.'" —Richard J. Onorato

52-53. **The fretful stir/Unprofitable**—Meaningless excitement. Cf. *Hamlet*, I. ii. 133-34 :

How weary, stale, flat and unprofitable
Seem to me all the uses of this world !

53. **The fever of the world**—Feverish preoccupation with worldly affairs. Cf. *Macbeth*, III. ii.

Duncan is in his grave,
After life's fitful fever, he sleeps well.

58-61. In these lines Wordsworth gives his first intimations of doubt as to the efficacy of Nature's presences.

60. **Sad perplexity**—The poet is perplexed and saddened because he realizes that the buoyancy of youth has gone for ever. Harold Bloom observes : "The 'sad perplexity' concerns the future and the enigma of the imagination when transposed from past to future time." Cf. *Ode on Intimations of Immortality*, 56-57 :

Whither is fled the visionary gleam ?
Where is it now, the glory and the dream ?

64-65. **Life and food/For future years**—Whenever the poet looks at a beautiful scene of Nature, he does not exhaust his enjoyment but reserves something for the future. Cf. *Daffodils*, 19-24 :

For oft, when on my couch I lie,
In vacant or in pensive mood,
They flash upon that inward eye
Which is the bliss of solitude ;
And then my heart with pleasure fills,
And dances with the daffodils.

67-68. **When like a roe/I bounded o'er the mountains**—"At first the bounding roe conveys simply the sense of a physically vigorous response, as well as that of an instinctual and seemingly unself-conscious one. These qualities in the past are easily distinguished from that of the present in which a thoughtful and self-conscious person is saying : 'the day is come when I again repose here. . . and view. . . while here I stand. . .', though what I have called the wishful quality of the language actually preserves the frenetic past response in the present one. But then the mention of the 'bounding roe' seems to have suggested a further recollection of himself—"more like a man/Flying from something that he dreads"—because of the way in which bounding deer suggest startled deer

fleeing into a protective landscape. The suggestion is of fleeing from man, as Wordsworth actually was at the time, but although he completes the sense of the startled deer with the figure of his own fleeing person, he leaves it in that peculiar form : the figure of a man suggests a deer who suggests a man.” —Richard J. Onorato

73. **The coarser pleasures**—Unrefined pleasures which are purely physical. In the first two books of the *Prelude* Wordsworth has described the ‘coarser pleasures’ of his boyhood like boating, skating, bird-nesting, horse-riding, and bathing in the pools and lakes.

74. **Glad animal movements**—Physical exercises of childhood is opposed to the deeper impression which Nature produced on his mind in later life.

76-77. **The sounding cataract/Haunted me like a passion**—At this stage the sensuous aspect of Nature appealed to the poet most. Cf. *The Prelude*, Book II, 421-25 :

Yet were I grossly destitute of all
Those human sentiments that make this earth
So dear, if I should fail with grateful voice
To speak of you, ye mountains, and ye lakes
And sounding cataracts.

80. **An appetite**—“Strictly it was not mountain and woods but his passion for them, which could be called an appetite. But this appetite was itself created by what is craved. Scenery satisfied his eyes as food satisfies hunger.” —Turner

82-83. **Nor any interest/Unborrowed from the eye**—At that time the physical beauty of Nature was enough for him ; it needed not to be supplemented by contemplation.

84. **Aching joys**—The joy which the poet felt on seeing the beautiful objects of Nature was so intense that it became painful. Cf. Shelley, *With a Guitar, To Jane*, 6-8 :

Make the delighted spirit glow,
Till joy denies itself again.
And, too intense, is turned to pain.

86-87. **Other gifts/Have followed**—His early exuberance and all absorbing aesthetic delight have been replaced by a sober and contemplative delight. Cf. *Ode on Intimations of Immortality*, 178—187 :

Though nothing can bring back the hour
Of splendour in the grass, of glory in the flower ;
We will grieve not, rather find
Strength in what remains behind ;
In the primal sympathy
Which having been must ever be ;
In the soothing thoughts that spring
Out of human suffering ;
In the faith that looks through death,
In years that bring the philosophic mind.

88. **Abundant recompense**—Love of man, and the realization of the presence of a divine spirit in Nature are the 'gifts' which have more than compensated the loss of the raptures of youth.

90. **Thoughtless youth**—Youth unburdened by thought.

91-93. Harold Bloom has offered the following comment on these lines :

The dialectic of the senses here is vital in Wordsworth. The young child has an organic sense that combines seeing and hearing. The older child, awakening to the phenomenal world, sees a gleam in it that the mature man cannot see again. But the man gains an intimation of immortality, of his renewed continuity with the young child, by hearing a still, sad music as he sees a soberer colouring in Nature.

Here in *Tintern Abbey*, eight years before the completion of the Great Ode, Wordsworth anticipates the totality of its myth. As he listens to the sad music ("still" because it pipes to the spirit, not to the sensual ear of man) he hears evidence not only of man's morality but of man's inseparable bond with Nature.

91. **The still, sad music of humanity**—"It bears the full accent of Wordsworth's poetry. We can say of it that its music echoes in exact equivalence the emotional perception the words express. We can analyze that music: There are whispering sibilants repeated in *still, sad, sic*: there is the carry-over with subtle variations of the 'i' sound: vowels and consonants are musically combined. But the main force of the line comes from the conjunction of a purely emotive phrases like 'still sad music' with a word of vague but immense association like 'humanity'." —*Herbet Read*

93-102. This is the most famous passage of *Tintern Abbey*. In it Wordsworth recognizes the unity of spirit binding together the animate and the inanimate worlds. The same spirit that is working in the whole visible universe fills the mind of man too. Following are the important critical opinions on this passage :

(a) Other poets have expressed the idea of the spiritual harmony of the universe: Pope in admirably phrased and balanced lines :

All are but parts of one stupendous whole,
Whose body Nature is, and God the soul.

But truth is not thus 'carried alive' into the heart. Wordsworth's expression of the same idea has the authentic power of the poet's whole mind and personality. He tell what he knows.

—*Helen Darbishire*

(b) The dichotomy between the mental and material worlds which philosophers had increasingly taken for granted since the seventeenth century was to Wordsworth (as to Kant) wholly antipathetic, and he frequently in his verse attempts a general statement of the basis of the unity. Nowhere does he do so more.

impressively or more successful than here. But even here the success is equivocal. Despite Wordsworth's obvious striving to be as specific as he can, the sonority of the verse distracts attention from the meaning rather than enforces it. Clarity of vision concentrates upon the separate fragments—'the light of setting suns', 'the round ocean', 'the living air' 'the blue sky', 'the mind of man'—rather than on what it is that unites them. Hence the various references to this latter read like a series of attempts rather than a cumulative description: 'a presence', a scene', 'something', 'a motion', 'a spirit', ; and the two verbs predicated of this things, 'impels' and 'rolls through', contradict rather than reinforce each other. The attempt to convey its universality by repeating four time in two lines the word 'all' is heroic rather than successful.

This is not to say that the passage is not impressive : only that the claim Wordsworth make in it is not, to use his own phrases, 'carried alive into the heart by passion'. —R.O.C. Winkler

(c) As a consecration or sacramental vision this becomes the main burden of Wordsworth's song, until in *Peele Castle* it is exposed as only a dream, and the great light prevailing it is deprecated as "the light that never was, on sea or land". When Wordsworth still believed in that light, as in this crucial passage from *Tintern Abbey*, he was able to see and hear a primal unity manifested simultaneously in all subjects and all objects. Again, it is a laziness of our imaginations that tempts us to call this vision mystical for the mystical is finally incommunicable and Wordsworth desires to be a man talking to men about matters of common experience. The emphasis in *Tintern Abbey* is on things seen and things remembered, on the light of sense, not on the invisible world. The presence of outer Nature disturbs the mind, sets it into motion, until it realizes that Nature and itself are not utterly distinct, that they are mixed together, interfused. They are more interfused than the reciprocal relation between the outer presence and the mind's inner elevation in response would seem to indicate, for in speaking of that relation the poet still uses the vocabulary of definiteness and fixity. But the imagination dissolves such separateness. Within both Nature and Wordsworth is something that moves and breathes, and that blends subject and object as it animates them. —Harold Bloom

N.B. This is parallel to Coleridge's *The Eolian Harp* :

O! the one Life within us and abroad,
Which meets all motion and becomes its soul,
A light in sound, a sound-like power in light,
Rhythm in all thought, and joyance every where.

99. **The mind of man**—The poet believes that the mind of man is animated by the same spirit that persuades the entire universe. This explains his theory that there is a pre-existing harmony between the mind of man and Nature and that through a contact with Nature man can realize the ultimate reality.

100. **A motion and a spirit**—The spirit which informs all natural objects is variously described as a 'presence', a 'motion', a 'soul', 'wisdom and spirit of the Universe' etc.

102—111. H.W. Garrod has offered the following comment on this passage :

Note here 'the mighty world of eye and ear'—it is the only world. The poem is addressed to the poet's sister, and it is of her that he says elsewhere that 'she gave me eyes, she gave me ears'—the only gifts for which he had any use. But above all, note the lines where with deliberation and beyond the changes of misunderstanding, Wordsworth tells us that he recognizes in Nature and the report of sense, not merely the guide of feeling and of the heart, but the 'soul of all his moral being'.

Only a few years before he had spoken of himself, in the crisis of Godwinian period, as 'yielding up moral questions in despair'. Now in 'eyes and ears, he finds the answer to all moral questions.

106-107. **Both what they half create, / And what perceive**—His (Wordsworth's) consolation is that he half creates as well as perceive 'outward, Nature, for what is outward comes to him only through the gate of his own perception, and whatever cannot come to him is not relevant to his condition. Eyes and ears, the gates of perception, are not passive but selective. He cannot create the phenomena that present themselves to him ; they are given. But his choice among them is a kind of creation, and his choice is guided by memory. Memory is the mother of poetry for Wordsworth because the poem's half of the act of creation cannot proceed without the catalyst of recollecting the poet's response to an earlier version of the outward presence of Nature. Nature's half of the act is mysterious, except that Wordsworth insists that it cannot proceed without the initiating expression of man's love for what is outside himself."

—Harold Bloom

In this connexion Bernard Groom observes :

For the perception of beauty in Nature the poet is of course dependent upon his senses of sight and hearing ; but the senses which receive impressions in a wholly unimaginative way are no better than those of Peter Bell, in the poem named after him :

'A primrose by a river's brim
A yellow primrose was to him
And it was no more.'

The eye and ear of the poet are creative as well as receptive.

109. **The anchor of my purest thoughts**—The contemplation of Nature through the senses helped him to retain his hold upon his purest conceptions. Cf. *The Prelude*, II, 462—466 :

O Nature ! Thou hast fed
My lofty speculations ; and in thee

For this uneasy heart of ours I find
A never-failing principle of joy,
And purest passion.

112—59. Albert S. Gerard has offered the following comment on this passage (the last stanza) :

... the address to Dorothy is an indirect way for Wordsworth to turn back to his own self and such assurance as he may have gained so far. Indeed the last stanza repeats, on a smaller scale, the ambitious time scheme of the whole poem. In his sister's present (ll. 116—9 and 134—37). Wordsworth relives his own past as re-created in stanza IV. The imaginary landscape which surrounds Dorothy, with its, misty mountain winds' is reminiscent of the picturesque presentation of nature in stanza IV rather than of the quiet harmony of stanza I; likewise, Dorothy's 'wild eyes' and 'wild ecstasies' recall her brother's past 'aching joys' and 'dizzy raptures' rather than his present soberly meditative mood. The identification is pushed so far that Wordsworth projects his own present into his sister's future (ll. 137—146): not only will her mood be one of sober pleasure, but her memory of nature will play the same restoring role that is assigned to it in very similar terms in the beginning of stanza II and in stanza III; 'lovely forms' (l. 140) and 'all sweet sounds and harmonies' (l. 142) echo with significant precision on the 'beauteous forms' (l. 23) and the 'sensation sweet' (l. 27) of stanza II; they will provide 'healing thoughts' (l. 144) analogous to the 'tranquil restoration' (l. 30) to which she will be able to turn in times of 'solitude, or fear, or pain, or grief' (l. 143) in the same way as her brother now turns to his recollections of natural beauty for solace 'in lonely rooms', and 'mid the din of towns and cities' (ll. 25—6), in 'hours of weariness' (l. 27), when oppressed by 'the fretful stir unprofitable, and the fever of the world' (ll. 52-53).

116—121. In these lines Wordsworth turns to his sister Dorothy as an incarnation of his earlier self, as one who still feels the dizzy joys of natural communion that he himself can only recollect.

118-19. **The shooting lights/Of thy wild eyes**—De Quincey in his *Reminiscences of the English Lake Poets*, said of Dorothy Wordsworth: "Her eyes were not soft, as Mrs. Wordsworth's, nor were they fierce or bold; but they were wild and startling, and hurried in their motion."

Thelwall's "Lines written at Bridgewater"—composed 29 July, 1797, though only printed in *The Fairy of the Lake* (1802), p. 130 also contain a reference to Dorothy's bright eyes. Thelwall wished, he says, to settle down near 'My Samuel' and

Alfoxden's musing tenant, and the maid
Of ardent eye, who with fraternal love
Sweetens his solitude.

122. **Betray**—"Wordsworth uses the strong word 'betray' with its sexual implications, which are certainly present in the opening lines of the poem, where the poet's renewed passion is a lover's return."
—Harold Bloom

123—34. Richard J. Onorato has offered the following comment on this passage :

Did Wordsworth not know, one wonders, that he was *not* presenting the sense of "from joy to joy", but rather the opposite? that he was not merely noticing the apparent signs of joylessness: that threaten the cherished reality of joy, but rather expressing a profound sense of joylessness consistent with every other suggestion in the poem of the present reality he has left in revisiting the Wye Valley—the "lonely room" "the many shapes of joyless daylight?" The declarative sense simply does not survive the greater effect of a line like "The dreary intercourse of daily life," which gathers to itself the felt averisons of "evil", "rash", "sneers", "no kindness" and makes "dreary" the most expressive as well as the longest sounding word in the poem.

(Notice, too, that one even tends to hold "daily" unusually long as if repeating "dreary", intensifying in that way the effect of "dreary" against its context, as if the line had only two stresses: "The drear-ry intercourse of dail-ly life.")

It is very difficult to believe that Wordsworth "means" here: what, unquestionably, he consciously wants to mean :

that all which we behold
Is full of blessings.

This affirmation makes clearer what is at stake : Nature has led him to this and it is a question of expressing one's sense of what one has been led to—a new joy in place of old ones, a reality full of blessings, or the opposite? The passage states one thing and expresses another. "Prevail against" makes us think of an assault made on one's "cheerful faith", and "cheerful faith", in its pathetic declarative flatness, seems less like an affirmation than a denial of an all but habitual cheerlessness. The assertion of Nature's benevolence is made simultaneously with the denial of possible doubt, though doubt is being raised by the effect of the passage. One might also say that Wordsworth asserts the conviction of joy along with and against the unavoidable expression of an intolerable sense of joylessness which is in part evoked by the Wye Valley and in part simply expressed there.

136-37. **And let the misty mountain-winds be free/To below against thee**—"As in *Michael* and *The Prelude*, the freedom of mountain mist and wind, sudden in their comings and goings, is a natural type of the wild freedom of ecstatic human imagination, the deep joy of that time when Nature for us is all in all."

144. **Healing thoughts**—The thought of Wordsworth's words will have power to heal the sorrows of her future years. Arnold rightly praised the healing power of Wordsworth's poetry :

Where will Europe's later hour,
Find Wordsworth's healing power ?

147-48. **If I should be where I no more can hear/Thy voice**—The fear of mortality, which has been haunting the poem, finally becomes overt here.

154-55. **With far deeper zeal/Of holier love**—"This is the vocabulary of religious devotion, displaced into a naturalistic mode. Certainly he protests too much ; we feel a desperation in his insistence, another presage of waning faith, or faith affirmed more vehemently even as it ebbs."
—*Harold Bloom*

159. **For the sake**—Wordsworth leaves out 'for my sake', but the poem has made clear that his salvation, as man and poet, is dependent upon the renovation he celebrates.

17

Ode on Intimations of Immortality

I. TEXT

I

Childhood
THERE was a time when meadow, grove, and stream,
The earth, and every common sight
To me did seem

He misses the glory and dreamlike fleshiness of childhood days -
Apparelled in celestial light, *clothed in radiant splendour -*
The glory and the freshness of a dream.

It is not now as it hath been of yore ; *attained maturity - so vanished*
Turn wheresoe'er I may,

By night or day,

The things which I have seen I now can see no more.

II

The Rainbow comes and goes,
And lovely is the Rose,

The moon doth with delight
Look round her when the heavens are bare,

Waters on a starry night
Are beautiful and fair ;

The sunshine is a glorious birth ;

But yet I know, where'er I go,
That there hath past away a glory from the earth.

III

Now, while the birds thus sing a joyous song,
And while the young lambs bound

As to the tabor's sound, *Something like kettle drum* 20.

To me alone there came a thought of grief :

A timely utterance gave that thought relief *(my heart leaps up when I behold)*

And I again am strong :

The cataracts below their trumpets from the steep ;

No more shall grief of mine the season wrong ;

I hear the Echoes through the mountains throng,

The Winds come to me from the fields of sleep,

And all the earth is gay ;

Land and sea

Give themselves up to jollity,
 And with the heart of May
 Doth every Beast keep holiday ;—
Thou Child of Joy, *so pleased boy - carefree & happy*
Shout round me, let me hear thy shouts, thou happy
Shepherd-boy !

35

IV

Ye blessed Creatures, I have heard the call
 Ye to each other make ; I see
 The heavens laugh with you in your jubilee ; *A Shout of joy.*
 My heart is at your festival,
 My head hath its coronal, *how an usurper of crowning Royal*
 The fulness of your bliss, I feel—I feel it all. *with flowers on*
Oh evil day ! if I were sullen *it would be hard to be sad*
While Earth herself is adorning,
This sweet May-morning, *when all earth is rejoicing*
And the Children are culling *Children in happy mood*
On every side, on each and every side —
In a thousand valleys far and wide,
Fresh flowers ; while the sun shines warm,
And the Babe leaps up on his Mother's arm :—
I hear, I hear, with joy I hear !
—But there's a Tree, of many, one, *The poet feels that*
A single Field which I have looked upon, *heavenly radiance is*
Both of them speak of something that is gone : Nature— *gone from objects of*
The Pansy at my feet *Small flower —*
Doth the same tale repeat : *repeats the same tale* *55*
Whither is fled the visionary gleam ? *of the poet.*
Where is it now, the glory and the dream ?
as the questions as to where the radiance has gone ?

V

we forget our
dead home
(Heaven).
 Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting ; *I have forgotten that—*
 The Soul that rises with us, our life's Star, *Soul of a man is*
 Hath had elsewhere its setting, *setting in one world and*
 And cometh from afar : *lies only in the other world.*
 Not in entire forgetfulness, *we do not forget heaven's splendour*
 And not in utter nakedness, *as we do not come naked.*
 But trailing clouds of glory do we come *65*
 From God, who is our home :
 Heaven lies about us in our infancy ! *memories of heaven*
 Shades of the prison-house begin to close *we get complete here*
 Upon the growing Boy,
 But He beholds the light, and whence it flows, *in the radiance of*
 He sees it in his joy ; *heaven, he sees the glimmer of*
 The Youth, who daily farther from the east *70*
 Must travel, still is Nature's Priest,
Nature is present in him

280

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantlab Jammu

WILLIAM WORDSWORTH

Is on his way attended ; *at last as man the*
 he Man *his audience* 75

At length the Man perceives it die away, *heavenly radiance* 75
And fade into the light of day.

And fade into the light of common day. *disappears and die*
man is discarded in day to day

VI *Life of this world.*

foster mother
takes care of the
child after
the death of
his own
mother.

Earth fills her lap with pleasures of her own
Yearnings she bath in her own

And, even with something of a Mother's mind,

And no unworthy aim, *does not possess that glory.*

To make her Foster-child, her inmate M^{rs} she tries to keep him

Forget the glories he hath known *the glories he hath known*

And that imperial palace whence he came. *the radiance of
heaven's glory where*

Earth makes him happy with things of earthy character.

VII

to accept-quit as soon
home- not to forget heaven

Before the Child among his new-born blisses.

A six years' Darling of a pigmy size! *Small Size* - 85

See, where mid work of his own hand he lies,
Fretted by sallies of his mother's pride,

Fretted by sallies of his mother's kisses,
With light upon him from his father's eyes,

With light upon him from his father's eyes
See, at his feet, some little plan of

Some fragment from his dream of human

Shaped by himself with newly-learned art:

A wedding or a festival,
A mourning or a funeral;

A mourning or a funeral
And this bath now

And this hath now his
and unto this he frames

Then will he fit his tongue

gues of business, love, or st

But it will not be long
Ere this be thrown

Ere this be thrown asi
And with new joy and

And with new joy and pr
le Actor cons another pa

from time to time his 'humor'

With all the Persons, down to palsied Age in

That Life brings with her in her equipage; *immortal old man*
As if his whole vocation; *trampling with*

As if his whole vocation
Were endless imitation

were endless imitation

VIII

Thou, whose exterior semblance doth belie
Thy Soule's inner fire

Thy Soul's immensity

Thou best Philosopher, who yet dost keep

Thy heritage, thou Eye among the blind,
That deal'st and silent to the world's

That, dead and silent, read'st the eternal deep,
Haunted for ever by the eternal mind—

Haunted for ever by the eternal mind,—

0 Agamniyam Digital Preservation Foundation

Mighty Prophet ! Seer blest !

On whom those truths do rest,

Which we are toiling all our lives to find, *which we have*
In darkness lost, the darkness of the grave *trying to find out*

Which we are toiling all our lives to find, *which we*
In darkness lost, the darkness of the grave *hoping to find one*
Thou, over whom thy Immortality *Chad aware of his immortality*

Thou, over whom thy Immortality *Child aware of his immortality*
Breeds like the Day a Master o'er a Slave *might over man.*

Broods like the Day, a Master o'er a Slave, *makes over*
 A Presence which is not to be put by *Immortality* *Conquer* 420 *noted*

[To whom the grave *(grave not final to child*
Is but a lonely bed without the sense or sight

Of day or the warm light,

A place of thought where we in waiting lie; *the other world.*
 That little Child, yet glorious in the might *of glorious* 25

Thou little Child, yet glorious in the night Still gloriest 125
Of heaven-born freedom on thy being's height, Still enjoys freedom.

Why with such earnest pains dost thou provoke

The years to bring the inevitable yoke, *imitate closer people*
Thus blindly with thy blessedness at strife?

Thus blindly with thy blessedness at strife?
Full soon thy Soul shall have her earthly freight, *Sooner 70430 shall*

And custom lie upon thee with a weight, *glasse burdens of life*
Heavy as frost, and deep almost as life! *and you will lose*

Advises not to imitate elders

O joy! that in our embers feels joy that a mature man
has not the remembrance

Is something that doth live, *does not forget of the remembrance*
That nature yet remembers? *of Heaven's complicity* 135

What was so fugitive !

The thought of our past years in me doth breed
Perpetual benediction: not indeed

Perpetual benediction : not indeed

For that which is most worthy to be blest—

For that which is most worthy to be best
Delight and liberty, the simple creed *Freedom*

Of Childhood, whether busy or at rest,

Of Childhood, whether busy or at rest,
With new-fledged hope still fluttering in his breast ;—

Not for these I raise *I don't thank childhood for these*

The song of thanks and praise ;

The song of thanks and praise,
But for those obstinate questionings
Of sense and outward things,
Platonic belief,
Of sense is not real.

Of sense and outward things,
Fallings from us, vanishings;

Fallings from us, vanishing,
Blank misgivings of a Creature *Mo had persistence*
in ability of world

Moving about in worlds not realised, *about reality of m*

High instincts before which our mortal Nature

Did tremble like a guilty Thing surprised:

But for those first affections, *was not the child not*
These shadowy recollections, *the delight and liberty; gentle*

Those shadowy recollections,
high, be they what they may,

Which, be they what they may,
at the fountain light of all our day

Are yet the fountain light of all our day,

Are yet a master-light of all our seeing ;

Uphold us, cherish, and have power to make

Uphold us, cherish, and have power
Our noisy years seem moments in the being

✓ Of the eternal Silence : truths that wake,

To perish never ;

To perish never. (certainly valuable experiences -)
 As a child a noble memories of life in heaven. Experiences -
 CC-0 Agamganga Digital Preservation Foundation, Chandigarh Funding by IKS MoE-2025-Grant
 memories make his past life in heaven.
 life is a brief interval between his past life in heaven & future life in heaven.

neither laziness nor too much energetic action, neither
martyrdom or triumph over all those influences which tend
to 282 ^{Grant Memorial College Of Education Bantala Jammu} ~~human~~ ^{human} happiness can completely destroy those
truth which existed in vague forms in his childhood -

WILLIAM WORDSWORTH:

Which neither listlessness, nor mad endeavour,

Nor Man nor Boy,

Nor all that is at enmity with joy,

Can utterly abolish or destroy ✓

Hence in a season of calm weather

165

Though inland far we be, ~~away from seashore~~

Our Souls have sight of that immortal sea ^{immortality}

Which brought us hither, ~~bring us to world~~

Can in a moment travel thither,

And see the Children sport upon the shore, ^{we occasionally}

And hear the mighty waters rolling evermore ^{get glimpses of heavenly life} 170

X

Then sing, ye Birds, sing, sing a joyous song! ^{as birds begin to sing}

And let the young Lambs bound

As to the tabor's sound! ^{jump}

We in thought will join your throng,

Ye that pipe and ye that play,

Ye that through your hearts to-day

Feel the gladness of the May! ^{let us feel the gladness} 175

What though the radiance which was once so bright

Be now for ever taken from my sight, ^{memories of heaven} 180

Though nothing can bring back the hour

Of splendour in the grass, of glory in the flower;

We will grieve not, rather find

Strength in what remains behind; ^{whatever remains we shall get strength in}

In the primal sympathy

Which having been must ever be;

In the soothing thoughts that spring

Out of human suffering;

In the faith that looks through death ^{consoling thoughts which result from an experience of human suffering -}

In years that bring the philosophic mind. ^{life after death} 185

Thoughtfulness which have come with maturity and ripeness of years. 190

XI

And O, ye Fountains, Meadows, Hills, and Groves,

Forebode not any severing of our loves! ^{shall not sever our love}

Yet in my heart of hearts I feel your might;

I only have relinquished one delight ^{heavenly splendour of childhood}

To live beneath your more habitual sway,

I love the Brooks which down their channels fret, ^{these have moral} 195

Even more than when I tripped lightly as they; ^{influence}

The innocent brightness of a new-born Day

Is lovely yet;

The Clouds that gather round the setting sun

Do take a sober colouring from an eye

That hath kept watch o'er man's mortality;

Another race hath been, and other palms are won,

Thanks to the human heart by which we live,

Thanks, he has lost the sense ^{deeper meaning for him} 200

Of his own life, he could feel joy, sorrow,

Sympathy when he looks

our knowledge
of immortality
of soul is based
upon our memories
of childhood

I will join in
thought the
merry making

natural
splendour
consolation
in
innate feeling of
sympathy in
human nature

made that
merry that
were in
childhood

the grown-up
man who is
the suffering
of human
race. These
things have
made him
thoughtful

filled with Philosophy, thoughts. when he looks at a man
of whom he is filled with such ideas as even leaves
Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu
cannot express. The objects of Nature fill him with thoughts

ODE ON INTIMATIONS OF IMMORTALITY

Connection with man and with man's relationship to 282

Thanks to its tenderness, its joys, and fears, Universe 205
To me the meanest flower that blows can give when he lives
Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears.

II. SUBSTANCE

As a child the poet saw all objects of Nature clothed in heavenly splendour. But now that he has attained maturity, he regrets that this splendour has vanished for ever. He misses the glory and the dream-like freshness which he saw in Nature in his childhood days. Objects of Nature—the rose, the rainbow, the moon and the stars—appear and pass away as before, but the celestial glory which they possessed has now departed from them.

(Stanzas I-II)

It is the season of spring, and all Nature is gay. The poet sees manifestations of joy by birds and lambs, but he is visited by a sad thought. He realizes that his grief is out of key with the joyous scenes of a bright May morning, and is impelled to rejoice with Nature's dumb creatures and shepherd-boys at play. He forces himself into a sympathetic gaiety. However, his mood of cheerfulness does not last long because a look at stray objects of Nature reminds him that something has passed away from the face of the earth. In a tone of sadness he asks himself where the glory and the dream have gone.

(Stanzas III-IV)

The poet now proceeds to answer the question that he has put to himself. When a man is born in this world, he brings with him some shadowy recollections of a divine origin. In his infancy he is surrounded with a heavenly radiance. It transforms the world around him. But as he advances in years, the darkness of the earth, which is a prison-house for the soul, begins to surround him, till, at last the light completely disappears in his manhood days.

(Stanza V)

Earth is the kindly foster-mother of man. She tries to lure the child away from heaven by offering all the pleasures and pleasant pursuits she can give and to make him forget his desire for the spiritual home.

(Stanza VI)

The small child of six years is lured away from thoughts of his divine origin by the love of his parents. He plays with his toys and arranges them according to some design of his own and with a skill that he has newly acquired. Very soon he finds himself absorbed in the worldly pursuits; and utters the words used in a business discussion, or the words of lovers, or the words of a dispute. Then he takes up different roles till he grows old.

(Stanza VII)

The child is unaware of the vastness of his soul. He is the best philosopher, the eye among the blind. The child, being haunted by the divine presence, is the best prophet and seer. He knows the truths which grown-up men spend all their lives to learn. The sense of immortality dominates the child as a master controls the slave. It is strange that the child should forget his divine heritage and blindly enter into the struggle for existence.

(Stanza VIII)

It delights the poet to think that in our ashes there still exists some spark of heavenly flame and that we remember even now something of that radiance which was so fleeting. He offers his thanks to childhood not because the child is always happy, carefree and hopeful, but because of those intuitions which bring home to us the unreality of the material world and the reality of that radiance which illumines earthly life and enables us to realize that the years we spend on earth are only moments in the being of infinitude. Nothing can destroy these intuitions, and in our tranquil mood they have the power of carrying us to a region where we can become aware of the spiritual life.

(Stanza IX)

The poet asks the birds, the young lambs and the shepherds to continue celebrations of spring. He is inclined to share their festive mood though only in imagination. It is true that the heavenly glory that the poet used to see in Nature in his childhood days has departed for ever. But he decides to reconcile himself to this loss. He will find consolation in other things—the feeling of sympathy for human sufferings, the faith in a life after death and the philosophic mind which he has developed with the advance in years.

(Stanza X)

The poet addresses the fountains, the meadows, the hills and the groves, and tells them that his love for them has not declined. He has relinquished only one delight in order to live more constantly as a matter of habit under the direct influence of Nature. His love of Nature is now sobered by sorrow and suffering. To him the brooks, the dawn and the sunset are as beautiful as ever; and thanks to his rich human sympathies, even the meanest flower today moves him with a poignant feeling.

(Stanza XI)

III. CRITICAL ESTIMATE

Wordsworth reached the highest peak of excellence with this ode in Romantic period.

Introduction

The Immortality Ode is one of the most famous poems in English literature. In the whole series of Wordsworth's poems it is the greatest and that to which all others lead up. Wordsworth reached one of the highest peaks of the English poetry of the Romantic period with this ode. Indeed, it is the high water-mark of poetry in the nineteenth century.

Title

Originally the poem did not bear any title, being simply designated as Ode. Noting the uncertainty of some critics Henry Crabb Robinson suggested to Wordsworth that there should be a descriptive title for the work 'to guide the reader to a perception of its drift'. The poet then deliberately chose the title, Ode: 'Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood', to emphasize what he conceived to the essential meaning.

"An understanding of the poem's imaginative source and meaning is not helped by the sub-title. It can be referred to simply as the *Ode* without risk of confusion with other odes which have their own fuller titles."¹

Sources in the Poet's Personal Life

Referring to the sources of the ode in his personal life, Wordsworth observes : *2 years interval between 1st Part & remaining stanzas*

"This was composed during my residence at Town-End, Grasmere. Two years at least passed between the writing of the first four stanzas and the remaining part. To the attentive and competent reader the whole sufficiently explains itself; but there may be no harm in adverting here to particular feelings or experiences of my own mind on which the structure of the poem partly rests. Nothing was more difficult for me in childhood than to admit the notion of death as a state applicable to my own being. I have said elsewhere :

‘A simple child
That lightly draws its breath,
And feels its life in every limb,
What should it know of death!’—

But it was not so much from the source of animal vivacity that my difficulty came, as from a sense of the indomitableness of the spirit within me.

Influenced by Enoch and Elijah
I used to brood over the stories of Enoch and Elijah, and almost persuade myself that, whatever might become of others, I should be translated in something of the same way, to heaven. With a feeling congenial to this, I was often unable to think of external things as having external existence, and I communed with all that I saw as something not apart from but inherent in, my own immaterial nature. Many times while going to school have I grasped at a wall or tree to recall myself from this abyss of idealism to the reality. At that time I was afraid of mere processes. In later periods of life I have deplored, as we have all reason to do, a subjugation of an opposite character, and have rejoiced over the remembrances, as is expressed in the lines—Obstinate Questionings, etc. To that dream-like vividness and splendour, which invest objects of sight in childhood, every one, I believe, if he would look back, could bear testimony, and I need not dwell upon it here : but having in the poem regarded it as a presumptive evidence of a prior state of existence, I think it right to protest against a conclusion, which has given pain to some good and pious persons, that I meant to inculcate such a belief. It is far too shadowy a notion to be recommended to faith, as more than an element in our instincts of immortality. But let us bear in mind that, though the idea is not advanced in revelation, there is nothing there to contradict it, and the Fall of Man presents

1. H.M. Margoliouth, *Wordsworth and Coleridge 1795—1834* (Oxford University Press/London, 1953), pp. 100-101.

Those people who are well versed into classic literature are ignorant of Platonie Philosophy -

an analogy in its favour. Accordingly, a pre-existent state has entered into the popular creeds of many nations; and, among all persons acquainted with classic literature, is known as an ingredient in Platonic philosophy. Archimedes said that he could move the world if he had a point whereon to rest his machine. Who has not felt the same aspirations as regards the world of his own mind? Having to wield some of its elements when I was impelled to write this poem on the 'Immortality of the Soul', I took hold of the notion of pre-existence as having sufficient foundation in humanity for authorising me to make for my purpose the best use of it I could as a poet" *(made pre-existence as a foundation for the immortality of the soul.)*

Themes

The ode has several themes. It depicts the visionary experiences of childhood, the fading of youthful vision with the advance of age, the natural piety that binds our days each to each, and the philosophical compensations of maturity. It also expresses the idea of pre-existence and the hope of immortality—not as an illusion but as a 'master light'. The poet seems to have laid emphasis on the theme of immortality which is placed absolutely in the foreground by the title of the poem. The central theme is the immortal nature of the human spirit, intuitively known by the child, partly forgotten by the growing man, but to be known once more in maturity through intense experience of heart and mind. "But this is not to say that the doctrine of pre-natal existence is set forth deliberately by Wordsworth as an accepted belief. Southey tilted the balance away when he called the poem 'The Ode on Pre-existence—a dark subject darkly handled'. Wordsworth's prosaic and scrupulous statement is a good answer to the question we are often constrained to ask of a poet: Do you really believe what you say? He says that he has not meant to inculcate a belief in a prior state of existence. 'It is far too shadowy a notion to be recommended to faith as more than an element in our instincts of immortality'."

Three Parts *(Stanza (Part?) V-VIII (Part 2nd) IX-XI (Part 3rd))*

The poem falls into three parts. The first four stanzas which form the first part put the fact: "There hath passed a glory from the earth"; and in the last two lines of them, ask the explanation of it. Stanza V-VIII constitute the second part. This part gives the explanation in the form of the doctrine of reminiscence. The third part (stanzas IX-XI) is an attempt to vindicate the value of a life from which 'vision' has fled. As Bowra puts it: "The three parts of the Ode deal in turn with a crisis, an explanation, and a consolation, and in all three Wordsworth speaks of what is most important and most original in his poetry."

The three parts of the ode are not harmoniously blended together. Thus the second part of the poem is, in effect, an inter-

2. Helen Darbishire, *The Poet Wordsworth* (Oxford University Press/London, 1950), pp. 64-65.

polation, alien to opening and closing sections. The poem is grand in its design, but lacks the seamless unity of Tintern Abbey.

An Autobiographical Poem *(Spiritual autobiography)*

Like so much of the best of Wordsworth, the Immortality Ode is a piece of spiritual autobiography. Wordsworth wrote it between 1803 and 1806; so it was partly contemporary with The Prelude, of which its substance might have formed a part. In this ode the poet unlocks his heart and describes a crisis in his intellectual development. In his childhood he lived in 'the glory and the freshness' of the senses, in the immediate report given by the senses of 'principle of joy' in the world. But with advancing years this report comes to be fitful and dim. The things that the poet had seen he now can see no more. Wordsworth's loss of 'vision' marks the decline in poetic power which begins with the ending of the ode.

Referring to Wordsworth's loss of 'vision', Bowra observes: "He lived not only with but on nature, and what he prized most in it was its capacity to open to him another world through vision. It is this which he has lost, perhaps not entirely, but enough to cause him a deep anxiety. It is idle to ask too closely what Wordsworth means by 'the visionary gleam' or 'the glory and the dream'. If it were simple, he would probably have expressed it in simple words, but because it is complex and unfamiliar, he uses image and symbol."

In the Immortality Ode Wordsworth laments the loss of 'vision'; but he makes also the compensating discovery of new and soberer power, springing out of the harsher realities of 'man's inhumanity to man':

The Clouds that gather round the setting sun
Do take a sober colouring from an eve
That hath kept watch o'er man's mortality.

A Philosophical Poem

*1st four stanzas offer no explanation
2nd stanzas offer explanation.*
Like Tintern Abbey, the Immortality Ode is a great philosophical poem. The first four stanzas of the poem are lyrical and emotional, offering no reasons or explanations; but in the fifth stanza the poet embarks upon philosophy. The middle part of the poem gives Wordsworth's philosophy of childhood; here more than anywhere else in his works, he tries to reduce his scattered impressions and convictions into an orderly system.

"His philosophy has been compared to Plato's, but it is in fact less of an abstract system than a description of his own personal experience of life and the process of ageing. Briefly, his theory seems to be something like this: the new born soul does not come from nowhere, out of nothingness, but from some other ill-defined country—from afar, 'from an imperial palace'. (This is a fairly common conviction, held by mystics of various religions.) The little child still has clear memories and visions of this other, heavenly

place, but as he grows older they begin to fade. Earth does her best to make him forget this other place, and its glories, and the child himself tries (unwisely) to hurry on this process of forgetfulness, longing to be grow up, playing at being a grown-up, imitating adults in his games. Eventually he does grown up and forget, though he goes through a period when he still has rare glimpses of memory and vision, though unable to keep in constant contact with his sense of glory. When he is fully mature, even these glimpses are lost and 'fade into the light of common day'. On one level, this is a plain description of Wordsworth's own progress from childhood through youth to a somewhat bleak and disillusioned middle age; it is the same story that *The Prelude* tells. It is only Wordsworth's attempts to make his own experiences into a general philosophy, applicable to all men, and true of the whole human condition, that make the *Ode* confusing; Wordsworth was no philosopher, though he felt he ought to be one. His mind never dealt as easily in abstract ideas as it did with some massive single physical symbol like the leech gatherer."³

A Difficult Poem

Like *Tintern Abbey*, the *Immortality Ode* is a difficult poem. Many readers have felt the poem to be confused, or not completely unified.

"There are, if we look closely, two quite different 'intimations of immortality'. Whereas one implies the mortality of nature :

questionings
Of sense and outward things,
Fallings from us, vanishings ;
Blank misgivings of a Creature
Moving about in world not realize'd. . .

the other impleis its immortality :

the primal sympathy
Which having been must ever be.

In stanza IX especially, when Wordsworth says that his thanksgivings are less for the visionary gleam than for the visionary dreariness, and goes on to describe the latter as :

those first affections,
Those shadow recollections,
Which, be they what they may,
Are yet the fountain light of all our day,
Are yet a master light of all our seeing ;

it is hard to follow him. He seems to be willfully confusing moments of darkness and fear in which nature seemed alien to the child with moments of splendour and beauty which first developed the child's affections and drew them to nature in a more intimate way."⁴

3. Margaret Drabble, *Wordsworth* (Evans Brothers Limited/London, 1968), pp. 125-26.

4. Geoffrey H. Hartman, *Wordsworth's Poetry 1787-1814* (Yale University Press/New Haven, 1967), p. 276.

Vision of Life Victorious

"The poem is far from easy. The term 'immortality' means, 'death negated': it is a dramatic word and may be equated with life itself provided some recognition of death is incorporated. Such recognition our ode gives, celebrating life victorious over death. In poetic study we must never limit too closely a vast unknowable which the poem itself is created to define. So, though Wordsworth's ode, like Shakespeare's *Pericles* or Shelley's *Prometheus*, is a vision of immortality or life victorious, it need have nothing to say about life-after-death. It is rather a vision of essential, all-conquering life. The symbols which carry this over to us are flowers, springtime joy, bird music, all young life, and, pre-eminently, the child."

Two Childhoods *Childhood (we live) - Childhood (we carry through)*

In this ode we get a double vision of childhood, 'the childhood that we see being busily lived through by children and which we ourselves lived through, and the childhood which we carry within us like a memory, and which while grounded in our earliest years stays with us into adult life, for good or evil'.

As Alec King puts it: "These two childhoods may be called, for convenience, *visible childhood* and *invisible childhood*. We are mostly aware of the visible childhood in children. It is the mother, as Yeats understood, who knows best the invisible childhood, who in her 'passion, piety, or affection' knows the 'shape upon her lap' as a 'Presence' that symbolises 'all heavenly glory' and that mocks 'man's enterprise'."

The poet has distinguished these two childhoods, not only by what he says of each, but by different languages. The visible childhood of the 'six years' darling of a pigmy size is lived openly for us in the factual language of the seventh stanza. On the other hand, the invisible childhood is referred to, as it must be, in terms of metaphor and myth, especially in the eighth stanza, with its names for a child like 'thou best philosopher', 'thou eye among the blind'.

Two different Ideas about Nature

"... Wordsworth began the Ode at a time when he was exercised by two different ideas about nature. In the first place, the fitful returns of his youthful vision made him ask why they were not more frequent and more secure. This made him anxious and uneasy, and prompted the first stanzas of the Ode. In the second place, he believed that in the moral inspiration of nature he had found something to take the place of his visions, and this discovery gave to the Ode its positive and consoling character. Such, no doubt, was his state of mind when he conceived the outline of the Ode. But we may ask why this issue was forced so powerfully on Wordsworth in the spring of 1802, since he was aware of it when he wrote

5. G. Wilson Knight, *The Starlit Dome* (Methuen & Co. Ltd/London, 1959), p. 38.

*His visionary gift was not so dead as he had thought
but still at times returned to him -*

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantala Jammu

290

(moral Conceptions of Nature) -

WILLIAM WORDSWORTH

'Tintern Abbey' four years before. (No doubt in the interval he found that his visionary gift was not so dead as he had thought, but still at times returned to him.) No doubt, too, he saw more clearly how much comfort was to be found in his moral conception of nature. None the less, something must have happened to press the issue on him with a new and inescapable insistence."⁶

Platonic Influences *(Dignity of human Soul)*

Phaedrus
"Both Wordsworth and the Platonists emphasize recollection as a basis for believing in the dignity of man's soul. In Plato's *Phaedo*, for example, Socrates rebuts Simmias' epiphenomenalism by appealing to the doctrine of 'reminiscence'. The argument in this dialogue (a favourite of Wordsworth) is related both to the refutation of materialism and to the hope of immortality. Likewise, in the *Phaedrus*, Socrates maintains that the young soul fresh in the world has the most visionary perceptions. It seems likely that Wordsworth, perhaps under the guidance of Coleridge, would have been attracted to the *Phaedrus*, because it contains much concerning immortality and reminiscence. Similarly Proclus, who probably influenced the *Ode*, argued that the incorporeality of thought, that is, its independence of the perishable body, is shown by the mind's turning back upon itself in the act of memory. The very ability to remember, Proclus maintained, is inexplicable upon the basis of a materialistic philosophy. Possibly Wordsworth had in mind this argument when he wrote :

But for those first affections,

Those shadowy recollections,

Which, be they what they may,

Are yet the fountain light of all our day,

Are yet a master light of all our seeing.

*The visions of
child hood -*

Wordsworth evidently felt that his conclusions were valid even if the 'recollections' were not 'reminiscences' of pre-existence—for it is the mysterious power of memory, and not merely the reminiscence of a previous existence, that attests to the spiritual nature of man."

Form *(The Pindaric Poem (Cowley & Dryden))*

"The *Immortality Ode* is essentially a free Pindaric poem of the type established by Cowley and perfected by Dryden, but the form created for a baroque celebration of public themes has moved into an entirely new dimension. Wordsworth owed much to Dryden's of that poet. The freedom and variety of rhythm which Dryden employed, in *Alexander's Feast*, to express the varying human

6. Sir Maurice Bowra, *The Romantic Imagination* (Oxford University Press/London, 1966), p. 82.

7. Melvin Rader, *Wordsworth—A Philosophical Approach* (Oxford University Press/London, 1967), pp. 170-71.

passions which the lyre of Timothens could awaken or allay now becomes the vehicle for the shifting moods of the subjective Romantic poet."⁸

Language

The diction of this poem is supply moulded to the poet's purpose as his thought moves from stage to stage. "Matthew Arnold found something declamatory in the *Ode*, but those phrases which might, taken in isolation, deserve that epithet :

The cataracts blow their trumpets to the steep,—
The heavens laugh with you in their jubilee, *Shows of joy*
My head hath its coronal *(Crown of flowers)*

will be found to be right in their context, where the poet is forcing a joy which he does not feel, and his language accordingly receives a rhetorical heightening. When he cuts himself short with

But there's a Tree, of many, one,
A single Field which I have look'd upon,
Both of them speak of something that is gone,

he is once more in the vein of bare simplicity in which for him the bare truth is best told. The varied language of the *Ode*, released as it is from the experimental purpose that purged that of the *Lyrical Ballads*, has touches of splendour and of magic that belong to another mode altogether ; yet it has upon it the stamp of that earlier ascetic discipline. The words tell his thought with a truth and simplicity that remains the groundwork of his poetic style."⁹

Imagery *(In terms of light-expresses loss and recovery)*

The dominant image through which the poet's sense of loss and recovery is expressed is that of light. Indeed, the imagery of light presides over the whole ode. There are two other major images, those of the sea and flowers. The flower-image in one shape or another keeps threading its way through the ode till it comes to rest in the quiet beautiful lines of the close :

To me the meanest flower that blows can give *that joy which*
Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears. *even tears cannot express ;*

Conclusion

The *Immortality Ode* remains not merely the greatest, but the one really, dazzlingly, supremely great thing Wordsworth ever did. "Its theory has been scorned or impugned by some ; parts of it have even been called nonsense by critics of weight. But, sound or unsound, sense or nonsense, it is poetry, and magnificent poetry, from the first line to the last—poetry than which there is none better in

8. John Heath—Stubbs, *The Ode* (Oxford University Press/London, 1969), pp. 81-82.

9. Helen Darbishire, *The Poet Wordsworth* (Oxford University Press/London, 1950), pp. 73-74.

any language, poetry such as there is not perhaps more than a small volume-full in all languages."¹⁰

IV. OPINIONS OF CRITICS

1. In the ode, *Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood*, the author's gifts for lyrical and for metaphysical verse become perfect, and are for once united. He shows himself able to lift the burden of metrical freedom; using the historic species of the lawless rhymed ode, invented by the Jacobean, in whose conduct Coleridge is his only rival of his own day. The basis is the heroic line, which often serves rather for impassioned thinking than for a true chant; but it is sprinkled with shorter and blither measures, varying from eight syllables down to three, which are received by the ear at first with joyful surprise and then with as joyful an expectancy, but which do not drown the solemn fundamental march of the composition. These interludes task the poet, who always sang with difficulty, nor is every one of them successful; the close of the third stanza and the opening of the fourth have something of a false gallop, and even incorrect rhymes; *jollity, holiday, sullen, culling*. But Shelley could not have bettered, if he often equals, the *allegro* of 'The Rainbow comes and goes,' with its sudden long-drawn fall into disenchantment. And in the ninth verse, 'O joy! that in our embers,' there is an interweaving of solemn with gayer paces, which shows Wordsworth's utmost reach in the expression of contrasted emotions; while even in the seventh, 'Behold the Child,' which is purposely at a lower pitch and in a playful strain, there is no fault if we consider its purpose. And the conduct of the whole, with its sober close as of a splendid evening, gives at least as high a pleasure as the language. It is Wordsworth's single but supreme triumph in the highest kind of lyrical architecture.

He has answered all rational attacks on the conception of the poem. The combined radiance and unreality of outward objects, he had felt in his own childhood; it is a portion of his experience. The doctrine of reminiscence, which some have objected to as groundless, he does not pretend to be true; it is enough that the poet may write of it as though it were true. He took hold of it, he says,

as having sufficient foundation in humanity for authorising me to make for my purpose the best use I could as a poet.

We may doubt whether such ideas can bear to us, as they surely bore to Wordsworth, all the exaltation and fire that he put into them; we may think that the address to the child, in the eighth verse, as a seer and philosopher, leaves nothing loftier in reserve to be said of Plato; but we must admit that there is 'sufficient foundation in humanity' for authorising such an expense of power, in a writer commonly so frugal of mere splendour.

—Oliver Elton

10. George Saintsbury, *A History of Nineteenth Century Literature* (Macmillan & Co. Ltd/London, 1925), p. 54.
CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation, Chandigarh. Funding by IKS-MoE-2023-Grant

2. The absorbing interest of Plato is in the logical meanings of things ; to Wordsworth logical meanings are precisely that part of things which has no value. There is some degree of delusion, therefore, in speaking of the Platonism of Wordsworth ; and if we are to read the *Ode* rightly we shall do well begin by putting Plato out of our minds.

Our pre-natal existence is guaranteed for Plato by the fact that we can reason at all ; by the power in us to form class-conceptions. It is guaranteed to Wordsworth by a passivity of response to sense-impressions ; and in this connexion I feel obliged to reiterate what I have already said in another connexion. In considering the character of the impressions made upon Wordsworth by Nature, we must conceive ourselves always, I believe, to be dealing with impressions made upon a consciousness highly abnormal. The flashes thrown by sense on the invisible world came to him with a frequency and fullness of illumination not given to ordinary men. And just as his experience here is not ordinary, so I conceive it to be not ordinary in respect of that phenomenon which is the main theme of the *Ode*—in respect of the manner in which, as we pass from childhood to youth, and from youth to manhood, the flashes of vision become ever more and more faint and intermittent. That this is what happened in Wordsworth's own case it is not possible to doubt. He tells us so ; he reiterates it ; we may even say that it is a chief trouble of his soul—for the things that are thus passing from him are precisely the things which he regards as more precious than anything else in life. Yet so far as we can judge, so far as general report can be trusted, Wordsworth's experience in this particular is not that of ordinary men. One is tempted to the conjecture that the extraordinary force and frequency of the visionary experiences of his earlier years exhausted prematurely—actually wore out by over-use—the faculty of vision itself. In the *Ode*, and elsewhere, Wordsworth endeavours to persuade himself—and us—that he has replaced this visionary gift by some other gift or gifts ; that he still draws upon sources of experience not inferior in depth and clearness. But does he ? The great *Ode* closes the two volumes of 1807. Why is it that thereafter we pass into the dark, or, at any rate, out of the fullness of light, that we are conscious that, 'wherever we go', 'there hath passed a glory' from his poetry, and that the things which we have seen with his eyes, we 'now can see no more' ? In this early decay of a faculty abnormally developed and abnormally employed I am inclined (leaving the faculty itself unexplained in its origin and nature) to seek at least a partial explanation of the extraordinary decline in poetic power which begins with the ending of the *Ode*.
—H.W. Garrod

3. Wordsworth... is looking at man in a double way, seeing man both in his ideal nature and in his earthly activity. The two views do not so much contradict as supplement each other. If in stanzas V-VIII Wordsworth tells us that we live by decrease, in stanzas IX-XI he tells us of the everlasting connection of the dimi-

nished person with his own ideal personality. The child hands on to the hampered adult the imperial nature, 'the primal sympathy/ Which having been must ever be,' the mind fitted to the universe, the universe to the mind. The sympathy is not so pure and intense in maturity as in childhood, but only because another relation grows up beside the relation of man to Nature—the relation of man to his fellows in the moral world of difficulty and pain. Given Wordsworth's epistemology the new relation is bound to change the very aspect of Nature itself: the clouds will take a sober colouring from an eye that hath kept watch o'er man's mortality, but a sober colour is a colour still.

There is sorrow in the Ode, the inevitable sorrow of giving up an old habit of vision for a new one. In shifting the centre of his interest from Nature to man in the field of morality Wordsworth is fulfilling his own conception of the three ages of man which Professor Beatty has expounded so well. The shift in interest he called the coming of 'the philosophic mind,' but the word 'philosophic' does not have here either of two of its meanings in common usage—it does not mean abstract and it does not mean apathetic. Wordsworth is not saying, and it is sentimental and unimaginative of us to say, that he has become less a feeling man and less a poet. He is only saying that he has become less a youth. Indeed, the Ode is so little a farewell to art, so little a dirge sung over departing powers, that it is actually the very opposite—it is a welcome of new powers and a dedication to a new poetic subject. For if sensitivity and responsiveness be among the poetic powers, what else is Wordsworth saying at the end of the poem except that he has a greater sensitivity and responsiveness than ever before? The 'philosophic mind' has not decreased but, on the contrary, increased the power to feel.

The clouds that gather round the setting sun
Do take a sober colouring from an eye
That hath kept watch o'er man's mortality;
Another race hath been and other palms are won.
Thanks to the human heart by which we live,
Thanks to its tenderness, its joys, and fears,
To me the meanest flower that blows can give
Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears.

The meanest flower is significant now not only because, like the small celandine, it speaks of age, suffering, and death, but because to a man who is aware of man's mortality the world becomes significant and precious. The knowledge of man's mortality—this must be carefully noted in a poem presumably about immortality—now replaces the 'glory' as the agency which makes things significant and precious. We are back again at optics, which we have nerve really left, and the Ode in a very honest fashion has come full circle.

The new poetic powers of sensitivity and responsiveness are now not so much in degree as in kind, and they would therefore seem

to require a new poetic subject matter for their exercise. And the very definition of the new powers seems to imply what the new subject matter must be—thoughts that lie too deep for tears are ideally the thoughts which are brought to mind by tragedy. It would be an extravagant but not an absurd reading of the Ode that found it to be Wordsworth's farewell to the characteristic mode of his poetry, the mode that Keats called the 'egotistical sub-lime' and a dedication to the mode of tragedy. But the tragic mode could not be Wordsworth's. He did not have the 'negative capability' which Keats believed to be the source of Shakespeare's power, the gift of being able to be 'content with half-knowledge,' to give up the irritable reaching after fact and reason,' to remain in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts'. In this he was at one with all the poets of the Romantic Movement and after—negative capability was impossible for them to come by and tragedy was not for them. But although Wordsworth did not realize the new kind of art which seems implied by his sense of new powers, yet his bold declaration that he had acquired a new way of feeling makes it impossible for us to go on saying that the Ode was his 'conscious farewell to his art, a dirge sung over his departing powers.'

—Lionel Trilling

4. The theory of recollection goes back to Plato, but Wordsworth did not take it from him, nor is his application of it Plato's. His sources are Coleridge and Henry Vaughan. Coleridge had played with the idea of pre-existence done something or been somewhere. He expresses it in a sonnet which he wrote in 1796 on hearing the news of Hartley's birth :

Oft o'er my brain does that strange fancy roll
Which makes the present (while the flash doth last)
Seem a mere semblance of some unknown past,
Mixed with such feelings, as perplex the soul
Self-questioned in her sleep ; and some have said
We lived, ere yet this robe of flesh we wore.

Wordsworth picked up the idea because it helped him to explain his own visionary moments. But of course the actual experience of which he speaks is different from Coleridge's. It is not an isolated moment but a process in which the visionary power, at its most powerful in childhood, slowly declines. And this decline was what Wordsworth found in Vaughan's poem, "The Retreat" Vaughan recalls and regrets the days of his "Angell-Infancy", and tells how the vision of celestial things has grown weaker with passing years. But this idea, too, changes in Wordsworth's handling. He is concerned with the loss not of imagination but of innocence. From Coleridge Wordsworth took the idea of pre-existence and from Vaughan that of a slow decline in celestial powers, and from this combination formed his own original theory.

—Sir Maurice Bowra

5. Like so much of the best of Wordsworth, it is a piece of spiritual autobiography, composed between 1803 and 1806. That is

to say, it was partly contemporary with the *Prelude*, of which its substance might have formed a part. But it is composed with far more literary artifice, in long strophes with varied line-lengths of the kind that were supposed, in remote imitation of Pindar, to be peculiarly suitable for odes. Wordsworth handles this difficult scheme magnificently, and the poem has a sustained lyric splendour of which we have hardly any other example in his works. It is also notable because it is built on a piece of poetic faith that is something less than whole-hearted, nearer to Coleridge's "willing suspension of disbelief" than is usual with Wordsworth. The theme is the gradual decline in keenness of imagination as we pass from childhood to maturity. Wordsworth connects it with a sort of Platonic belief in pre-existence, a belief that

Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting,
The soul that rises with us, our life's star,
Hath had elsewhere its setting
And cometh from afar.

And this is certainly something that Wordsworth did not hold as an article of faith. But if he is here presenting his subject, as he rarely does, in an almost mythological guise, he has lost none of his power of dealing plainly with the facts of experience. The development described is as true to the movements of his own heart as the least elaborated passages of the *Prelude*, and beneath the quasi-Platonic myth is the essential truth that the deepest springs of his inspiration are in his childhood.

—Graham Hough

6. As a piece of poetic art no poem of Wordsworth stands up better to critical inspection. The thing is a triumph. The metrical form deserves close analysis no less than the imagery. Wordsworth had a surprising natural mastery of metre when he was in the poetic vein. A poet who could proceed in one stride from *Alice Fell* with its simple four-lined ballad stanza to the first part of this elaborate *Ode* (the composition of the two lies within a single fortnight) could have achieved anything he wished in metrical variety. In the *Ode* he launched upon an English Pindaric of the irregular form popularized by Cowley. He had never tried such a metre before, and he takes to it like a duck to water. Each stanza has its own shape and length, its own rhyme-scheme, its own subtle arrangement of the varying lengths of line : five foot, four foot, three foot, two foot, closing often on the slow-moving Alexandrine (one it is a fourteener), in which the thought settles and crystallizes. De Quincey said that Wordsworth had difficulty in rhyming. But here the rhymes, playing into the varying movement of the stanzas, seem refreshingly easy and natural : sometimes there are internal rhymes ; and the end-rhymes are here and there disyllabic. In Wordsworth's printed text there is one blind rhyme—it is in line 66, 'Heaven lies about us in our infancy'. But in the manuscript which Wordsworth prepared for the press he has with his own hand put this right, allowing himself for once a line of one foot.

ODE ON INTIMATIONS OF IMMORTALITY

But He
Beholds the light and whence it flows.

I have printed the lines thus in our Oxford text, and I hope the correction will be accepted.
—Helen Darbishire

7. He (Wordsworth) develops his thesis—that a small child, being nearer to its divine origins, enjoys an insight into the nature of things that is denied the grown man—in verse which attracted Coleridge's censure in a well-known passage in *Biographia Literaria*. In the absence of evidence to support this view, Wordsworth relies upon force of assertion to carry his point, and by the use of sonorous phrases like

Haunted for ever by the eternal mind

he seems to seek to distract our attention away from the tenuous significance of the words. But as the account proceeds, we become increasingly conscious of his failure to enlarge our imaginative grasp of the infant's communion with the ternal, and, in the absence of this, all that is developed is a sense of incongruity ; so that when Wordsworth draws a picture of what is implied by his earlier account—

Hence in a season of calm weather
Though inland far we be,
Our souls have sight of that immortal sea
Which brought us hither,
Can in a moment travel thither,
And see the Children sport upon the shore,
And hear the mighty waters rolling evermore.

—it is difficult, despite the sonority, to elude altogether the suggestion of a fast coach to a sort of celestial Brighton.

Despite the implied self-reassurance the poet remains preoccupied with the irrecoverable losses ; and there is a marked contrast between the impact of the lines recording these :

Though nothing can bring back the hour
Of splendour in the grass, of glory in the flower ;

—with the two abrupt bursts of words like flames going up from a collapsing fire—and the lines that flatly and unconvincingly record the consolations that remain :

We will grieve not, rather find
Strength in what remains behind.

The tone is simply assertive—

Which having been must ever be

—and the thought is abridged to a sententiousness that approaches the unfeeling :

In the soothing thoughts that spring
Out of human suffering.

In this poem Wordsworth is, as it were, providing his own case-book. He recognizes that natural objects no longer have the same significance in his emotional life, and claims that the loss is compensated for by gains of other kinds. He convinces us of the loss, but the gains are merely asserted, not created for the reader to share. They derive, indeed, from theory rather than from experience. Wordsworth's failure to establish as part of the reader's experience of the poem the gains which he claims is itself evidence of the loss he so poignantly records.

—R.O.C. Winkler

8. The subject of the Ode, Lionel Trilling has said, is growing up. Yet though it is true that the subject is conceived, except for the organizing myth, in naturalistic terms, Wordsworth's high style and the religious intensity of his emotions must be considered. There is a Hebrew prayer which praises God's mercy in restoring the soul every morning in his body, even as He restores it to the dead. Some of the terror of discontinuity behind the gratitude of this prayer is also in Wordsworth's Ode. The poet fears a decay of his "genial" responses to nature, and he fears that this decay has affected his powers of renovation. Growing up is not enough; these must be linked, else they cannot be actualized, to the renewal of earlier feelings, to joy in nature. It is easy to gain the world and to lose one's soul.

This deeper concern with renewal explains why Wordsworth is so affected by what appears to be a very little thing: a wrong echo. On this May morning, his heart responds with a thought of grief instead of equal gaiety. All other creatures have the proper harmonic echo, the immediate internal response to nature's influence. The young lambs bound "As to the tabor's sound"—there is no tabor, but Wordsworth sees their joy as a responsive joy. He calls them and the other participants in nature's jubilee "blessed Creatures"; "And God created. . . every living creature that moveth. . . and God saw that it was good. And God blessed them, saying, Be fruitful and multiply." God responded to them, God *recognized* them, but the poet's heart is dull. We remember the opening of "Resolution and Independence", where everything echoes and responds: the Jay to the Magpie, the Stockdove to its own call, and even the glittering mist to the hare wherever the latter runs.

That Wordsworth should take a momentary grief as an omen questioning his power to be renewed, to be 'naturally' renewed, is typical of his spiritual state at this time. *The Prelude* also begins with a failed response (overcome more lightly), and the fear that his "genial spirits" might be decaying was already quietly expressed in *re-ent*, not an unusual, fear. The Ode, in fact, begins with a *re-ent* statement, and only then proceeds to mention the particular moment which perhaps was the occasion of that generality. Each failure of joy, each feeling of indifference or alienation, newly accuses the poet. Much later in his life, when he seems to be resigning to

what he here still resists, and an "Evening of Extraordinary Splendour" surprises him, he will querulously demand: "This glimpse of glory, why renewed?" But in the Ode he rises to an answering vigour of imagination.

—**Geoffrey H. Hartman**

9. It is neither easy nor clear. It has neither the simple story basis of the *Leech Gatherer*, nor the clearly developed argument of the *Ode to Duty*. It is wholly irregular in stanza form and rhyme scheme, and its language jumps without warning from the simple to the conventionally poetic to the philosophical, and back again. Its very title is enough to warn the reader that it is hardly the most straightforward of poems, and its meanings have been the source of endless discussion. Despite these difficulties, however, it has always been a popular piece for teaching in schools, partly because of its evident importance, and partly perhaps because it appears to deal with the subject of childhood, a subject which is supposed to appeal to the young. In fact, it is not really about childhood at all; it is about the death of childhood and the loss of joy, and it is extremely difficult for young people to sympathize with it at all. It is essentially a middle-aged poem, and for Wordsworth it is something of a swan song. He does his best to close it on a note of optimism and hope, but nevertheless what comes across most powerfully from the poem is a feeling of anguished regret for what is lost. However, nobly he resolves to bear his loss, resolution itself can never make up for what is gone, and he knows it.

—**Margaret Drabble**

10. The greatness of this poem is that, with an Ode's proper fulness of recognition, it celebrates the central bewildering episode of the story of mankind—that episode which is part of the biological history of man, which is re-enacted in every individual life as it grows to maturity, and which is an allegory of innumerable moments of illumination or obscurity throughout our adult lives.

The poem gathers together first our archetypal childhood, the myth of life still fresh, still in total unity with the Universe, still unburdened with the perplexity of inside and outside, effortlessly in the I-thou' relation with all that is, still conscious only of the Dance, not of the I-dancing; and the image of childhood is given with such delicate balance between the language of myth and the language of objective fact, that the mature mind, handling the dream, knowing its exclusion from it, crying the age-old cry of 'there was a time', feels how the dream might at any moment re-assume the actual and return him to the bliss he has lost. But neither mankind nor individual man can turn back down the winding path already travelled. Though his archetype stays within his mind, it is the image of a home, a heaven, a glory, to be perpetually rediscovered in another way by resolutely going on. We must undertake the common life of man, his perplexing imprisonment in the conscious egotistic struggle for mastery, for place, comforted as best we can by the endlessly active goings-on of our earth. We look at children to find them practising their adult lives-to-be, never content to remain in their

heaven-born freedom. Only when we have taken on ourselves the yoke of common human existence do we know how to name the radiant vision of childhood. And we are blessed if, in our 'little puddle of light thrown by big-lamps of custom' we remember the feel of the immense supernatural vision that childhood knows even sometimes with a tremor of fear ; for it is this insight that all creative minds are toiling all their lives to rediscover, not with the shallow innocence of a child, but with the passion, knowledge, and love that is possible to a mature mind.

—Alec King

V. NOTES

1. **There was a time**—Wordsworth refers to his childhood when he could see all natural objects clothed in a radiant splendour.

2. **Every common sight**—The word 'common' is sometimes used by the poet in a favourable sense (as here) of the natural beauty which may be found everywhere. Cf. *The Prelude*, IV. 230 :

All the sweetness of a common dawn.

4. **Apparelled in celestial light**—Clothed in a heavenly radiance. Cf. *Composed Upon Westminster Bridge*, 4-5 :

This City now doth, like a garment, wear
The beauty of the morning.

5. **The glory and the freshness of a dream**—The celestial light imparted to Nature the splendour and novelty that belong to a vision in dream. Cf. *The Excursion*, Book I, 142-47 :

And, being still unsatisfied with aught
Of dimmer character, he thence attained
An active power to fasten images
Upon his brain ; and on their pictured lines
Intensely brooded, even till they acquired
The liveliness of a dream.

9. **The things which I have seen I now can see no more**—“The main force lies in the twelve evenly-stressed monosyllables of the last line of the first stanza (line 9). Their knell-like flatness of tone, after the two short, feverish lines which precede, achieves a sense of desolation too empty even to imply resignation.”

—R.O.C. Winkler

10. **The Rainbow comes and goes**—The poet responds to the beauty of the rainbow with unusual delight. Cf. *The Rainbow*, 1-4 :

My heart leaps up when I behold
A rainbow in the sky :
So was it when my life began ;
So is it now I am a man.

12-13. **The Moon doth with delight/Look round her
when the heavens are bare—The moon appears in the sky in**

the sky in divine majesty as though she were inclined to enjoy the beauty of the clear sky around her.

N.B. Helen Darbishire cites the following lines from Blake as a parallel :

The moon, like a flower,
In heaven's high bower,
With silent delight
Sits and smiles on the night.

16. **The sunshine is a glorious birth**—"The line has a double suggestion : of the sunrise after night and of the life-giving power of the sun."
—G.S. Brett

Birth—Here 'birth' is equal to 'thing born'. The poet has used the abstract for concrete.

21. **The tabor's sound**—"The tabor was a circular frame covered with parchment, something like a small kettle-drum, on which, suspended round his neck, the player beat with a stick with one hand, while with the other he held his pipe, to which the tabor formed an accompaniment."
—A. Hamilton Thompson

23. **A timely utterance gave that thought relief**—Lionel Trilling observes :

Professor Garrod believes that this 'utterance' was 'My heart leaps up when I behold', which was written the day before the Ode was begun. Certainly this poem is most intimately related to the Ode—its theme, the legacy left by the child to the man, is a dominant theme of the Ode, and Wordsworth used its last lines as the Ode's epigraph. But I should like to suggest that the 'utterance' was something else. In line 43 Wordsworth says, 'Oh evil day ! if I were sullen', and the word 'sullen' leaps out at us as a striking and carefully chosen word. Now there is one poem in which Wordsworth says that he was sullen ; it is 'Resolution and Independence'.

We know that Wordsworth was working on the first part of the Ode on the 27th of March, the day after the composition of the rainbow poem. On the 17th of June he added a little to the Ode, but what he added we do not know. Between these two dates Wordsworth and Dorothy had paid their visit to Coleridge, who was sojourning at Keswick : during this visit Coleridge, on April 4, had written 'Dejection : an Ode', very probably after he had read what was already in existence of the Immortality Ode. Coleridge's mental state was very bad—still, not so bad as to keep him from writing a great poem—and the Wordsworths were much distressed. A month later, on May 3, Wordsworth began to compose 'The Leech-Gatherer', later known as 'Resolution and Independence'. It is this poem that is, I think, the timely utterance.

25. **The cataracts blow their trumpets from the steep**—
The cataracts produce a roaring sound like that of a trumpet
proclaiming victory as they fall down from steep mountains.

26. **No more shall grief of mine the season grief**—The poet will no more do injustice to the joys of the season, being sad when everything around him is rejoicing.

27. **I hear the Echoes through the mountains throng**—The poet hears innumerable sounds echoing through the mountains.

28. **The Winds come to me from the fields of sleep**—“Perhaps it merely means that a west wind blows; the west where the sun sets being emblematic of sleep.”—Dowden. Bernard Groom suggests that Wordsworth is here contrasting the noises of a mountain (lines 25-27) with the tranquillity of the neighbouring fields.

34. **Child of Joy**—The poet refers to the shepherd-boy who is so care-free and happy.

38. **Jubilee**—A shout of joy.

40. **Coronal**—Crown of flowers. The allusion is to the old Roman custom of crowning the head with flowers on festive occasions.

49. **The Babe leaps up on his Mother's arm**—The child shows its vitality and happiness by leaping up in the air. Cf. *We Are Seven* :

—A simple child.
That lightly draws its breath,
That feels its life in every limb—
What should it know of death ?

51-53. “Wordsworth thinks it strange that one tree and one field only out of the many trees and fields around him should have power to recall his loss to him. They were perhaps a tree and field closely connected with some incident in his boyhood, and thus the sight of them revived the old sensations more keenly than those with which he had no such associations.”
—Clara L. Thomson

54. **Pansy**—A small flower. It is considered as symbolical of pensive thoughts.

58-76. In these lines Wordsworth recalls the Platonic doctrine of a former existence in which the soul contemplates God and those ideal forms which are the archetypes of the forms of earth. Referring to Wordsworth's theory of recollection developed here Sir Maurica Bowra observes :

The theory of recollection goes back to Plato, but Wordsworth did not take it from him, nor is his application of it Plato's. His sources are Coleridge and Henry Vaughan. Coleridge had played with the idea of pre-existence as an explanation of a feeling that we have in a previous existence done something or been somewhere. He expresses it in a sonnet which he wrote in 1796 on hearing the news of Hartley's birth :

Oft o'er my brain does that strange fancy roll
Which makes the present (while the flash doth last)

Seem a mere semblance of some unknown past,
Mixed with such feelings, as perplex the soul
Self-questioned in her sleep ; and some have said
We lived, ere yet this robe of flesh we wore.

Wordsworth picked up the idea because it helped him to explain his own visionary moments. But of course the actual experience of which he speaks is different from Coleridge's. It is not an isolated moment but a process in which the visionary power, at its most powerful in childhood, slowly declines. And this decline was what Wordsworth found in Vaughan's poem, "The Retreat", Vaughan recalls and regrets the days of his "Angell-Infancy", and tells how the vision of celestial things has grown weaker with passing years. But this idea, too, changes in Wordsworth's handling. His concerned with the loss not of imagination but of innocence. From Coleridge Wordsworth took the idea of pre-existence and from Vaughan that of a slow decline in celestial powers, and from this combination formed his own original theory.

58. **Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting**—Life in the world is a sort of sleep from which we wake up after death. Cf. Shelley, *Adonais* :

Life, like a dome of many-coloured glass
Stains the white radiance of eternity,
Until Death tramples it to fragments.

59-60. **The Soul that rises with us, our life's Star, Hath had elsewhere its setting**—"As a star disappears below the horizon of one hemisphere before it can appear above the horizon of another, so our soul ceased to inhabit a previous state before it accompanied us into the present life." —Webb

63. **Not in utter nakedness**—The child is not entirely divested of the traces of its glorious past.

64. **Trailing clouds of glory**—The soul is accompanied by divine radiance just as the rising star may have bright clouds trailing after it.

66. **Heaven lies about us in our infancy**—In our infancy we are surrounded by traces of heavenly glory. Cf. Henry Vaughan, *The Retreat* :

Happy those early days when I
Shined in my angel-infancy !

67-68. **Shades of the prison-house begin to close/Upon the growing Boy**—As the child grows into a boy he is increasingly assailed by material interests.

71. **Farther from the east**—Away from heaven from which the soul comes. It should be noted that the east is the Biblical symbol of God.

75. **At length the Man perceives it die away.** As the child grows, its faculty of seeing the divine radiance declines until in manhood it disappears altogether.

79. **With something of a Mother's mind.** "Man being a native of heaven, Earth is represented throughout this stanza as his foster-mother or nurse, who though not his real mother, still has a strong natural affection for the child entrusted to her care." — *Webb*

81-84. With no evil motive Nature does all that lies in her power to make man (her foster-child) more affectionately attached to her and forget the glories of the heavenly abode from where he came to this world.

85-89. Sir Maurice Bowra has offered the following comment on these lines :

This child is Hartley Coleridge, who was born in 1796 and could fairly be described as "a six years' Darling" in 1802. He seems to have been a delightfully imaginative little boy, who made an irresistible appeal to all who knew him. . . The child, Hartley, captivated Wordsworth and became one of the chief figures in the Ode. It is his games of make-believe which are described in the seventh stanza, and he who illustrates Wordsworth's theory that children trail "clouds of glory" from another world.

88. **Fretted by sallies of his mother's kisses.** Annoyed by his mother's sudden bursts of love expressed in torrents of kisses.

103. **His 'humorous stage'.** "The stage on which he sets forth the moods and caprices of mankind. The child imitates all the characters that he sees around him at one time playing as being a schoolboy, at another, an old man, and to on." — *Webb*. It should be noted that the phrase 'humorous stage' has been taken from Daniel's *Musophilus*.

106-107. **As if his whole vocation/Were endless imitation.** "The child's 'whole vocation' seems to be 'endless imitation' because his creative spirit is still unsullied and unhampered."

— *Bowra*

108-32. It is interesting to note that Coleridge did not like the sentiments expressed in these lines. This is what he said :

Now here, not to stop at the daring spirit of metaphor which connects the epithets 'deaf and silent', with the apostrophized *eye* : of (if we are to refer it to the preceding word, philosopher) the faulty and equivocal syntax of the passage ; and without examining the propriety of making a 'master brood o'er a slave', or the *day* brood at all ; we will merely ask, what does all this mean ? In what sense is a child of that age a *philosopher* ? In what sense does he *read* 'the eternal deep' ? In what sense is he declared to be 'for ever haunted' by the Supreme Being ? or so inspired as to deserve the splendid titles of a *mighty prophet*, a *blessed seer* ? By reflection ? by knowledge ? by conscious intuition ? or by *any form or modification of consciousness* ?

112. **Deaf and silent.** The poet describes the child as 'deaf and silent' because he is not aware of his innate power and gives no sign of its possession.

118-24. "The spiritual life of the child had its source, he thought, behind birth, and its goal beyond death. Immortality, that unearthly light that broods over the child, a 'Master o'er a slave', is for the child a truth—a truth which we are toiling all our lives to find, lost in the gloomy obsession of mortality, 'in darkness lost' the 'darkness of the grave'." —*Helen Darbishire*

125-26. **Thou little Child, yet glorious in the might/Of heaven-born freedom on thy being's height.** "The unconsciousness of death gives the child's mind and being a 'freedom' of the highest kind, 'heaven-born'. The thoughts of the grown-up man are, on the other hand, darkened and distorted by 'the darkness of the grave' (line 118)" —*Bernard Groom*

127. **Provoke.** "The child 'provokes' the years in the sense that he desires and strives to be grown-up." —*Brett*

130-32. "'Earthly freight', 'lie upon thee', 'weight', 'heavy frost', 'deep almost as life'. What do these suggest if not the horrors of living burial, with the weight of the cold earth frozenly pressing on the thing sunk almost as deep as its existence: that is, all but irredeemably. Notice how strangely Wordsworth's love of deathly cold is inverted here to a more normal, a more healthy, sense-valuation." —*G. Wilson Knight*

132. **Heavy as frost, and deep almost as life.** "Subduing thee, as frost does the soil, and penetrating thy whole being, like the vital principle." —*Webb Cf. The Prelude, XIV. 157-162 :*

The tendency, too potent in itself,
Of use and custom to bow down the soul
Under a growing weight of vulgar sense,
And substitute a universe of death
For that which moves with light and life informed,
Actual, divine, and true.

133-36. Alec King has offered the following comment on these lines :

Our invisible childhood is 'fugitive', it dies away, but remains a perpetual possibility, as light which has gone out in a fire still stays to be reborn from the embers. Light is not born from embers by its own will but by a breath from outside: it is not we but nature that remembers what was so fugitive. Here is Wordsworth's faith in the nature which he has called a homely nurse, which he trusts to keep alive in us our immortal childhood by her own way of showing us in her material images symbols of 'the Light that never was on sea or land'.

137-38. **The thought of our past years in me doth breed/perpetual benediction.** The heart of the poet rises up in thanks for the memories of glorious childhood, which we retain even in advanced age.

142. **New-fledged hope.** The new-born hopes which constantly agitate the child's mind. Perhaps this is in imitation of Milton's *Comus* in which hope is compared to a new-born bird.

145-51. G. Wilson Knight has offered the following comment on these lines :

Observe how here 'sense and outward things' are 'questioned'. This is an intellectual falsification. In the moment of child vision, nature was itself the divine glory, and the youth therefore 'nature's priest'. Remembering the quality of that vision, without being able to re-experience it in direct contact with the actual, the mind is forced into an idealism which regard the other, lesser nature, as 'questionable'. The poet thus moves in formless worlds, traversing the wide spaceless vacancies of abstract and inhuman recollection, without the creative power to fuse such vision-longing with immediate experience ; the process at times evident in *The Prelude*, which is, we may remember, merely a recollection of child-moments in maturity, and not necessarily an authentic autobiographical record. This 'mortal nature', once the vision is gone, is truly a thing of meanness, and indeed a whole universe separates the one nature from the other.

145-46. **Those obstinate questionings/Of sense and outward things.** The child persistently questions the reality of the objects perceived by the senses. In this connexion Wordsworth writes : "I was often unable to think of external things as having external existence, and I communed with all that I saw as something not apart from, but inherent in, my own immaterial nature. Many times while going to school have I grasped at a wall or tree to recall myself from this abyss of idealism to the reality." Cf. *To The Cuckoo*, 29-31 :

The earth we pace
Again appears to me
An unsubstantial, faery place.

147. **Fallings from us, vanishings.** "Fits of utter dreaminess and abstraction, when nothing material seems solid, but everything mere mist and shadow."—*Hales*

Wordsworth's own explanation of the line is : "There was a time in my life when I had to push against something that resisted, to be sure of my own mind ; everything else fell away, vanished into thought."

157-59. **Have power to make/Our noisy years seem moments in the being/Of the eternal Silence.** When compared with the eternity of time our earthly existence seems a brief interval of unrest. Cf. *Vaughan, The World* :

I saw Eternity the other night,
 Like a great ring of pure and endless light,
 All calm, as it was bright,
 And round beneath it Time in hours, days, years,
 Driven by the spheres
 Like a vast shadow moved ; in which the world
 And all her train were hurled.

165-171. Helen Darbishire has offered the following comment on these lines :

These lines, the most beautiful in the poem, are at the height of imaginative vision. The image has a magic and a sensuous beauty rare in Wordsworth ; yet it is finally characteristic in its vision of real and ideal, energy and peace, simple picture and far-reaching thought. It brings together the peaceful remoteness of life inland and the stirring sight and sound of the open sea. It touches the homely vision of children playing on an earthly shore with the mystic radiance of the spiritual world. And it clarifies and crystallises the thought of the stanza, setting the sea on the idea of tranquillity, the soul's 'season of calm weather', as the one fruitful state for meditation, and of the undying memory, by which childhood links us to eternity.

185. **Primal sympathy.** Wordsworth seeks consolation in the thought that the inborn sympathy which linked the child's soul to the universe remains intact. Cf. *The Prelude*, Book I, 580-85 :

An intellectual charm, that calm delight
 Which, if I err not, surely must belong
 To those first-born affinities that fit
 Our new existence to existing things,
 And, in our dawn of being, constitute
 The bond of union betwixt life and joy.

187-88. **The soothing thoughts that spring/Out of human suffering.** "The suffering that Wordsworth had specially in mind was the sorrow caused by the death of his brother John, which took place between the composition of the first four and the remaining stanzas of the poem."—*Clara L. Thomson* Cf. *Tintern Abbey*, 91-93 :

The still, sad music of humanity,
 Nor harsh nor grating, though of ample power
 To chasten and subdue.

194. **One delight.** The 'one delight' is the old visionary power.

195. **Habitual sway.** The 'habitual sway' is that companionship with Nature which the poet had always enjoyed and now believed to be more lasting and less intermittent than his visions.

200-202. **The Clouds that gather round the setting sun/Do take a sober colouring from an eye/That hath kept watch/Over man's mortality.** The clouds that accompany the sunset, convey man's mortality.

though so bright and gorgeous, are tinged with sadness to a person who has watched man's death, for he realizes that man also, like the sun, must sink at last below the horizon.

203. **Another race hath been, and other palms are won.** A new course of strenuous self-discipline has been gone through, and it has brought him new spiritual gains to balance the loss he has sustained.

204-207. Aubrey de Vere has offered the following comment on these lines :

The close (lines 204-207) of this sublime odd restores to the reader's mind that repose which is needful after the soarings and the sinkings of the strain.

The elegy ends in a hymn of praise ; the estrangement in reconciliation ; for Nature, beside her divine gleams so seldom revealed, has her human side, and that alone might well suffice for 'the brief parenthesis of mortal life'. Its tranquil gladness is intensified by the pathos, which loss alone can confer.

206-207. **To me the meanest flower that blows can give/
Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears.** The most insignificant flower can move his soul to its depth and produce such powerful feelings as cannot be expressed through tears of joy or sorrow. Cf. *The Tables Turned*, 21-24 :

One impulse from a vernal wood
May teach you more of man,
Of moral evil and of good,
Than all the sages can.

Resolution and Independence

I. TEXT

I

THERE was a roaring in the wind all night ;
The rain came heavily and fell in floods ;
But now the sun is rising calm and bright ;
The birds are singing in the distant woods ;
Over his own sweet voice the Stock-dove broods ; 5
The Jay makes answer as the Magpie chatters ;
And all the air is filled with pleasant noise of waters.

II

All things that love the sun are out of doors ;
The sky rejoices in the morning's birth ;
The grass is bright with rain-drops ;—on the moors 10
The hare is running races in her mirth ;
And with her feet she from the plashy earth
Raises a mist, that, glittering in the sun,
Runs with her all the way, wherever she doth run.

III

I was a Traveller then upon the moor, 15
I saw the hare that raced about with joy ;
I heard the woods and distant waters roar ;
Or heard them not, as happy as a boy :
The pleasant season did my heart employ :
My old remembrances went from me wholly ; 20
And all the ways of men, so vain and melancholy.

IV

But, as it sometimes chanceth, from the might
Of joy in minds that can no further go,
As high as we have mounted in delight
In our dejection do we sink as low ; 25
To me that morning did it happen so ;

And fears and fancies thick upon me came ;
Dim sadness—and blind thoughts, I knew not, nor could name.

V

I heard the sky-lark warbling in the sky ;
And I bethought me of the playful hare : 30
Even such a happy Child of earth am I ;
Even as these blissful creatures do I fare ;
Far from the world I walk, and from all care ;
But there may come another day to me—
Solitude, pain of heart, distress, and poverty. 35

VI

My whole life I have lived in pleasant thought,
As if life's business were a summer mood ;
As if all needful things would come unsought
To genial faith, still rich in genial good ;
But how can He expect that others should 40
Build for him, sow for him, and at his call
Love him, who for himself will take no heed at all ?

VII

I thought of Chatterton, the marvellous Boy,
The sleepless Soul that perished in his pride ;
Of Him who walked in glory and in joy 45
Following his plough, along the mountain-side :
By our own spirits are we deified :
We Poets in our youth begin in gladness ;
But thereof come in the end despondency and madness.

VIII

Now, whether it were by peculiar grace, 50
A leading from above, a something given,
Yet it befell, that, in this lonely place,
When I with these untoward thoughts had striven,
Beside a pool bare to the eye of heaven
I saw a Man before me unawares :
The oldest man he seemed that ever wore grey hairs. 55

IX

As a huge stone is sometimes seen to lie
Couched on the bald top of an eminence ;
Wonder to all who do the same espy,
By what means it could thither come, and whence ;
So that it seems a thing endued with sense : 60
Like a sea-beast crawled forth, that on a shelf
Of rock or sand reposeth, there to sun itself

X

Such seemed this Man, not all alive nor dead,
 Nor all asleep—in his extreme old age :
 His body was bent double, feet and head
 Coming together in life's pilgrimage ;
 As if some dire constraint of pain, or rage
 Of sickness felt by him in times long past,
 A more than human weight upon his frame had cast. 70

XI

Himself he propped, limbs, body, and pale face,
 Upon a long grey staff of shaven wood :
 And, still as I drew near with gentle pace,
 Upon the margin of that moorish flood
 Motionless as a cloud the old Man stood, 75
 That heareth not the loud winds when they call
 And moveth all together, if it move at all.

XII

At length, himself unsettling, he the pond
 Stirred with his staff, and fixedly did look
 Upon the muddy water, which he conned, 80
 As if he had been reading in a book :
 And now a stranger's privilege I took ;
 And, drawing to his side, to him did say,
 "This morning gives us promise of a glorious day."

XIII

A gentle answer did the old Man make, 85
 In courteous speech which forth he slowly drew :
 And him with further words I thus bespake,
 "What occupation do you there pursue ?
 This is a lonesome place for one like you."
 Ere he replied, a flash of mild surprise 90
 Broke from the sable orbs of his yet-vivid eyes.

XIV

His words came feebly, from a feeble chest,
 But each in solemn order followed each,
 With something of a lofty utterance drest—
 Choice word and measured phrase, above the reach 95
 Of ordinary men ; a stately speech ;
 Such as grave Livers do in Scotland use,
 Religious men, who give to God and man their dues.

XV

He told, that to these waters he had come
 To gather leeches, being old and poor : 100

Employment hazardous and wearisome !
 And he had many hardships to endure :
 From pond to pond he roamed, from moor to moor ;
 Housing, with God's good help, by choice or chance,
 And in this way he gained an honest maintenance. 105

XVI

The old Man still stood talking by my side ;
 But now his voice to me was like a stream
 Scarce heard ; nor word from word could I divide ;
 And the whole body of the Man did seem
 Like one whom I had met with in a dream ; 110
 Or like a man from some far region sent,
 To give me human strength, by apt admonishment.

XVII

My former thoughts returned : the fear that kills ;
 And hope that is unwilling to be fed ;
 Cold, pain, and labour, and all fleshly ills ; 115
 And mighty Poets in their misery dead.
 —Perplexed, and longing to be comforted,
 My question eagerly did I renew,
 "How is it that you live, and what is it you do ?"

XVIII

He with a smile did then his words repeat ; 120
 And said, that, gathering leeches, far and wide
 He travelled ; stirring thus above his feet
 The waters of the pools where they abide.
 "Once I could meet with them on every side ;
 But they have dwindled long by slow decay ;
 Yet still I persevere, and find them where I may." 125

XIX

While he was talking thus, the lonely place,
 The old Man's shape, and speech—all troubled me :
 In my mind's eye I seemed to see him pace 130
 About the weary moors continually,
 Wandering about alone and silently.
 While I these thoughts within myself pursued,
 He, having made a pause, the same discourse renewed.

XX

And soon with this he other matter blended,
 Cheerfully uttered, with demeanour kind,
 But starchy in the main, and Chaucerian in the end, 135
 "And now, my friend, I have said all that I can."

I could have laughed myself to scorn to find
 In that decrepit Man so firm a mind.
 "God", said I, "be my help and stay secure ;
 I'll think of the Leech gatherer on the lonely moor !" 140

II. SUMMARY

After a night of stormy winds and heavy showers the weather became clear in the morning. It was beautiful scene with the sun shining brightly and the birds singing in the woods. All things that loved sun-shine were out of doors. The sky seemed to be delighted at the break of dawn. Rain-drops glittered on the blades of grass and the hare frisked merrily on the wet ground. (*Stanzas I & II*)

The poet was wandering upon the moor that morning. He witnessed the hare's playful gambols and heard the songs of birds and the sounds of flooding waters. He was enchanted by the fine weather. The gloomy thoughts of the past departed from his mind and he forgot the meaningless talk or action of men. (*Stanza III*)

Gloomy reaction is apt to follow a condition of extreme delight. This exactly happened to the poet that morning. The mind of the poet was suddenly gripped by fears, caprices and dark thoughts. (*Stanza IV*)

The poet heard the skylark singing in the sky and reminded himself of the playful hare. Till now he had lived the life of a happy child of the earth, but the future might not be so kind to him. He feared that loneliness, anguish of heart, distress and poverty might be his lot one day. (*Stanza V*)

The poet spent a life undisturbed by those wants and cares which usually oppress other people. But he realized that God would not allow other people to serve or help anybody who was altogether indifferent to his own welfare. (*Stanza VI*)

The poet thought of the tragic fate of Chatterton and of Burns. The poetical spirit, which is a kind of divine inspiration, raises the poet to superhuman status. But, as it often happens, the source of poetical inspiration soon dries up, and the poet becomes a victim of despair and madness. (*Stanza VII*)

It appeared to the poet that God himself showed the way to fight against his dejection. While the poet was trying to recover from the fit of melancholy into which he had fallen he noticed a very old man beside a pool lying flat under the sky. (*Stanza VIII*)

The old man stood like a huge stone lying on the bare top of a hill, which might look like a sea-beast, come out of its abode in the sea to bask itself in the sun. (*Stanza IX*)

The old man seemed neither to be alive nor dead nor asleep. His body was bent double, and when he walked his feet and head

seemed to come together. It seemed that he was the victim of some acute pain or severe illness that had afflicted him in his youth.

(Stanza X)

As he supported himself on a long wooden stick, his limbs, pale face and body seemed to be moulded together. The poet advanced towards him with gentle pace, but the old man stood motionless. His immobility was as massive as a cloud's.

(Stanza XI)

The old man bestirred himself and disturbed the water of the pond with his staff. Then he looked closely at the muddy water. The poet took the liberty of speaking to him and remarked that the day promised to be bright.

(Stanza XII)

The old man gave a gentle answer. He spoke in a respectful voice with a pause. Then the poet asked him what he was doing in a lonely place like that. Before he replied, a gleam of a little surprise burst forth from the circles of his dark eyes which were still piercing.

(Stanza XIII)

The old man spoke in a feeble voice, but every word was uttered distinctly. The language in which he spoke was quite above the reach of the common people; it had the dignity which marks the speech of the Scotch Presbyterians who fulfil their duties to God and man.

(Stanza XIV)

He told the poet that he had come to that pool in order to gather leeches. His work was risky and tiresome. He had to move from pond to pond and from moor to moor in order to earn an honest living. Sometimes he found lodgings for himself by God's grace, but at other times he had to depend upon chance.

(Stanza XV)

The old man went on talking, but the poet could not follow him word by word because his voice appeared to be coming from some distance like the sound of murmuring waters. He seemed to the poet like a man in the dream or like one sent from the other world to give him manly courage by apt reproof.

(Stanza XVI)

All the melancholy thoughts which had been troubling the poet returned to him at this stage—the fear that kills, the hope that does not expect its fulfilment, cold, pain, toil, physical pains and the recollection of great poets who died in distress. The poet, who was puzzled and stood in need of consolation, asked the old man how he managed to bear the burden of living.

(Stanza XVII)

The old man repeated his words with a smile. He said that he travelled far and wide in order to catch leeches. He complained that leeches were not so plentiful now as they were in the past. They had decreased by slowly dying out; still he persevered to collect them wherever he could.

(Stanza XVIII)

The poet was greatly troubled by the loneliness of the place and the impression of other worldliness which the man's body and

speech created.* In his imagination the poet saw the old man wandering about the moors continually and silently. While the poet pursued these thoughts within himself the old man resumed his speech. (Stanza XIX)

The old man soon included other things in his talk. He spoke in a dignified style with kind looks and gestures. When the old man stopped speaking, the poet felt inclined to laugh himself to scorn to find so resolute a mind in his decrepit body. Then the poet prayed to God to help him to derive strength from the example of the leech-gatherer on the lonely moor. (Stanza XX)

III. CRITICAL ESTIMATE

Introduction

Some of the poems of Wordsworth are records of chance encounters, unimportant in themselves, yet transfigured by some sudden moment of illumination. *Resolution and Independence* is one of them. It was composed in May 1802, in the midst of a new surge of poetic activity equalled only by that of 1797-98. It is perhaps the poem in which we see more of Wordsworth than in any other single poem.

History

"The history of the poem is somewhat curious. On October 3rd, 1800 William and Dorothy met an old man in the road who told them that he was a leech-gatherer. Dorothy's description of him in her Journal gives us the ground-work of the poem. He was 'almost double', wore 'an apron and a night-cap', besides two coats; he had had a wife, 'a good woman, and it pleased God to bless us with ten children'. All these were dead but one, of whom he had not heard for many years, a sailor. His trade was to gather leeches, but now leeches are scarce and he had not strength for it. He lived by begging and was making his way to Carlisle, there he should buy a few godly books to sell. . . he had been hurt in driving a cart, . . . his body driven over, his skull fractured.'

It will be noticed that nearly two years elapsed between meeting the leech-gatherer and writing the poem. And the old man of the poem is not a retired, but a working leech-gatherer and Wordsworth meets him, not in the road, and in Dorothy's company, but alone on a moor, beside a mountain pool. *The Leech-Gatherer* is, indeed, an example of a new picture created by Wordsworth out of old materials drawn from the 'hiding-places' of the past, united to more recent experiences and moods. Of these, the most striking in the poem is the mood of exaltation with which the poem opens, followed immediately by one of depression and gloom at the thought of 'mighty poets in their misery dead'.¹

1. Mary Moorman, *William Wordsworth—The Early Years 1770-1803* (Oxford University Press/London, 1957), p. 538.

Basis in Personal Experience

A letter of Wordsworth's reveals the basis of this poem in his personal experience. "I will explain to you", writes Wordsworth, "in prose, my feelings in writing that poem. I describe myself as having been exalted to the highest pitch of delight by the joyousness and beauty of Nature ; and then as depressed, even in the midst of those beautiful objects, to the lowest dejection and despair. A young poet in the midst of the happiness of Nature is described as overwhelmed by the thoughts of the miserable reverses which have befallen the happiest of all men, viz. poets. I think of this till I am so deeply impressed with it, that I consider the manner in which I am rescued from any dejection and despair almost as an interposition of Providence. A person reading the poem with feelings like mine will have been awed and controlled, expecting something spiritual or supernatural. What is brought forward ? A lonely place, 'a pond, by which an old man was, far from all house or home : ' not *stood*, not *sat*, but *was*—the figure presented in the most naked simplicity possible. The feeling of spirituality or supernaturalness is again referred to as being strong in my mind in his passage. How came he here ? thought I, or what can he be doing ? I then describe him, whether ill or well is not for me to judge with perfect confidence ; but this I *can* confidently affirm, that though I believe God has given me a strong imagination, I cannot conceive a figure more impressive than that of an old man like this, the survivor of a wife and ten children, travelling alone among the mountains and all lonely places, carrying with him his own fortitude, and the necessities which an unjust state of society has laid upon him. You speak of his speech as tedious.

Everything is tedious when one does not read with the feelings of the author. *The Thorn* is tedious to hundreds ; and so is *The Idiot Boy* to hundreds. It is in the character of the old man to tell his story, which an impatient reader must feel tedious. But, good heavens ! such a figure, in such a place ; a pious, self-respecting, miserably infirm and pleased old man, telling such a tale !"

Theme

The poem is a lyric about the evolution of an observer through his evolving vision of an old man. "There is the same difference of actuality between the observer and the old man that there is between the observer of *Tintern Abbey* and the landscape. The old man is neither unequivocally objective nor the other because he looks as he does and means what he does only to this particular observer, who has just passed from joy in identifying himself with nature to despair in realizing the difference from nature.

Thus, the old man's appearance evolves with the observer's understanding of him. First he appears half inanimate, half animate—like an unaccountably situated boulder the life-like quality of which is compared to that of a sea-beast barely distinguishable from the shelf on which it reposes.

Such seemed this Man, not all alive nor dead,
Nor all asleep—in his extreme old age.

The ambiguity shows the old man's existence as mysterious. But the observer's penetration of the mystery shifts the ambiguity from the lowest reaches of life to the highest, to the line between nature and spirit.

The Old Man still stood talking by my side ;
But now his voice to me was like a stream
Scarce heard ; nor word from word could I divide ;
And the whole body of the Man did seem
Like one whom I had met with in a dream ;
Or like a man from some far region sent,
To give me human strength, by apt admonishment.

The answer to the observer's original question about man's relation to nature comes as the greatest mystery of all—as an archetypal vision of the old man, not unlike the vision in *Tintern Abbey* of Dorothy as a child of nature :

Therefore let the moon
Shine on thee in thy solitary walk ;
And let the misty mountain-winds be free
To below against thee.

But this is a vision of Man's tragic and triumphant disharmony with nature :

While he was talking thus, the lonely place,
The Old Man's shape, and speech—all troubled me :
In my mind's eye I seemed to see him pace
About the weary moors continually,
Wandering about alone and silently.

On the other hand, the poem is a narrative about a man who learns a lesson through a providential encounter. It even ends with a moral :

‘God’, said I, ‘be my help and stay secure ;
I’ll think of the Leech-gatherer on the lonely moor !’

On the other hand, it is a poem like *Tintern Abbey* and *Ode to a Nightingale* about a movement of perception, with the moral a merely partial and problematical abstraction from the final penetrating vision. The moral returns us to the world of ordinary perception in the same way as Keats’ ‘Do I wake or sleep ?’²

The Poet's Problem

Resolution and Independence has some relevance to the personal problems with which Wordsworth was confronted as an adult. The psychological problem, as he sees it in this poem, is the melancholia with which he is now afflicted.

2. Robert Langbaum, *The Poetry of Experience* (Chatto & Windus/ London, 1957), pp. 54-55.

"How is it that moments of ecstatic happiness are followed, apparently without any reason, by moods of the deepest depression? In 'Resolution and Independence' he seems almost to correlate the adult's happiness with his success in forgetting his social responsibilities :

My old remembrance went from me wholly ;
And all the ways of men, so vain and melancholy.

The melancholia returns with the realisation that reality cannot be kept indefinitely at arm's length :

Far from the world I walk, and from all care ;
But there may come another day to me
Solitude, pain of heart, distress, and poverty.

It will be remembered that the poet is saved from self-pity by contemplating the Leech-gatherer, who is so much grosser a victim of 'the way of men' and who yet retains a measure of cheerfulness."³

Importance in the Poet's Life

"*The Leech-Gatherer (Resolution and Independence)* is of personal importance in the life of Wordsworth because it shows that he was still, in spite of the loss of his vision of the glory of Nature lamented in the *Ode*, capable of passing into the visionary state when deeply moved by human encounters. It took a year and a half for the vision to mature. The great significance which the old man came to have for him was the result of the accumulated fears and hopes of his creative years. Yet it was in the end a simple moral experience. He felt himself rebuked, admonished, cheered. The last stanza carries us deep into Wordsworth's real humility of heart :

And soon with this he other matter blended,
Cheerfully uttered, with demeanour kind,
But stately in the main—

(again, we are reminded of the discharged soldier's 'stately air of mild indifference')

and, when he ended,
I could have laughed myself to scorn to find
In that decrepit Man so firm a mind.
'God', said I, 'be my help and stay secure,
I'll think of the Leech-gatherer upon the lonely moor !'"⁴

Possible Indebtedness to Spenser

Wordsworth wrote : "The grand store-houses of enthusiastic and meditative Imagination, of poetical, as contra-distinguished from human and dramatic Imagination, are the prophetic and lyrical

3. F. W. Bateson, *Wordsworth—A Reinterpretation* (Longmans, Green & Co./London, 1954), p. 161.

4. Mary Moorman, *William Wordsworth: The Early Years, 1770-1803* (Oxford University Press/London, 1957), p. 342.

parts of the Holy Scriptures, and the works of Milton ; to which I cannot forebear to add those of Spenser."

Now it is Spenser who is more helpful than Milton in clarifying the mode of *Resolution and Independence*. "Its basic situation is Spenser modified. The poet walks out into country on a beautiful day ; he is depressed (in Wordsworth's case depression has given way to joy only to turn back into depression) and comes upon a mysterious sight which restores him. This is the very scheme of Spenser's *Prothalamion* ; though what is important here is not the *Prothalamion* but what Spenser has done with the type it represents. Behind Spenser's mode there lies the dream-vision converted so calmly yet daringly into a waking vision that dream blends with reality and an autonomous product is created which we rather helplessly define as 'allegory'. Spenser walking along the Thames near London's brick towers is no dreamer, unless we adduce Goethe's definition of the poet as one who dreams with open eyes. For without any 'methought I saw' he views in open sight a marriage procession in which the bridesmaids are water-nymphs :

All lovely daughters of the flood thereby
With goodly greenish looks all loose untyde,

and the brides-to-be are swans floating down the Thames as fair and white as Leda. This is a direct exercise of the mythopoetic imagination in the context of a realistic scene, and no facile retranslation of the swans into the barges that carried the Lady Elizabeth and the Lady Katherine Somerset can undo the metamorphosis. It is Spenser's courage we admire, his passing from personal cares at court to a magnificence which redeems the courtly life, but which stands or falls with his unashamed direct exercise of the poetical faculty. Behind this faculty, however, here so personally exerted, is the 'prothalamic' imagination in general, which brings together not only man and woman, but also myth and reality, human and divine, nature and human nature.

This 'union' is also achieved by 'Resolution and Independence' in very different circumstances. On the deserted moor, a man appears to Wordsworth 'unawares', and the sight is ghostly enough to make him suspect a divine apparition. Yet though he tends toward apocalyptic thoughts, a precarious intermingling of vision and matter of fact is all the while maintained. Wordsworth's mode differs, of course, from that established by Spenser's fiat. It is not even a mode, strictly speaking, but an uncertain consolidation of thoughts. Spenser's refrain, for example, "Sweet Themmes, runne softly, till I end my song", is the very emblem of literary and natural continuity, and indicates by its steady return how much time is at man's disposal, how everything will flow along in order and degree, and how the world is too well established on the flood for any 'end' to be feared. But Wordsworth's greatest lyrics are acts of a living mind open to the terror of discontinuity. His encounter with the Leech-gatherer is unrelieved by myth or allegory or any steadying

indulgence. The waters do not flow easily ; the strange repetitions (s.s. XVII ff.) have no aim that is not mental and precarious ; and the continuity, even on the level of rhythm (that last, draggle-tailed alexandrine), is uncertain. We feel the poet's distraught perplexity, as if this could not be, or could not last."⁵

Profound Simplicity

"This poem is a good example of what people mean when they speak of Wordsworth's 'profound simplicity'. At first sight, there is nothing complicated about it at all. The moral of 'count your blessings' appears to be straightforward enough. The story and its setting are simple ; the moor, the pond, the racing hare, the weather and the old man himself are all described in very plain language. The one real event of the poem, Wordsworth's encounter with the o'd man, is outwardly at least the most ordinary sort of occurrence. In fact, to some people the whole poem seems ludicrously simple, and trivial to the point of insignificance ; Wordsworth had to defend it himself to his close friend and admirer, his wife's sister Sarah, who found the leech-gatherer's ramblings 'tedious'. He wrote to her with indignation :

It is in the character of the old man to tell his story in a manner which an *impatient* reader must necessarily find tedious. But Good God, such a figure, in such a place, a pious, self-respecting, miserably infirm Old Man telling such a tale.

That phrase—'such a figure, in such a place'—is the clue to the whole poem's power ; it is the time and the place, the circumstances, the reality of the situation that make the difference between a profound truth and a boring commonplace. What the leech-gatherer says may be simple and tedious enough, but its meaning in the context of the whole poem is new and weighty."⁶

Weakness

R.O.C. Winkler has clearly indicated the weakness of this poem :

"Such weakness as there is in the poem derives mainly from the drawing of the old man's character. The impression that he makes on the poet is very tellingly conveyed, but the reality which is the basis for this impression is less substantial. The evidence for the 'Resolution and Independence' on which the poem turns appears to consist in no more than that the leech-gatherer pursues—perhaps without much choice—'employment hazardous and wearisome', and is prepared to discuss it courteously and eloquently. The verse in which is evoked the old man's character, as distinct from the impres-

5. Geoffrey H. Hartman, *Wordsworth's Poetry 1787-1814* (Yale University Press/New Haven, 1964), pp. 267-68.

6. Margaret Drabble, *Wordsworth* (Evans Brothers Limited/London, 1968).

sion it made on the poet, includes some of the least effective in the poem—

a stately speech ;
Such as grave Livers do in Scotland use,
Religious men, who give to God and man their dues.

—tending, as it does, to lead the reader away from the old man himself into a comparison which smacks of special pleading. Such passages appear the more colourless when measured against those—such as that of the stone and sea-beast—in which the poet's subjective impression is evoked ; and when the comparison is made, the image of the sea-beast seems rather out of scale, since the reality to which it corresponds is so faintly drawn. If indeed, the image of the huge stone and the sea-beast relates only to the old man's physical appearance, it seems more than out-of-scale, in seems incongruous ; and yet at the point in the poem at which it occurs, the poet has learnt nothing of the leech-gatherer's character."

Style and Imagery

In *Resolution and Independence* Wordsworth has employed a style of perfect plainness. Here his expression may be called bald ; but it is bald as the bare mountain tops are bald, with a baldness which is full of grandeur. When we read this poem, we find many lines of extraordinary grandeur, but, mingled with them, lines more pedestrian than could be found in an impressive poem from any other hand,—for instance,

And, drawing to his side, to him did say,
'This morning gives us promise of a glorious day.'

or,

'How is it that you live, and what is it you do ?'

"In *Resolution and Independence*, where Wordsworth adopts a form of the Spenserian stanza, he introduces a simile which is a fine example of the modern handling of this classical type.

On the desolate moor he is suddenly aware of a solitary figure :

Beside a pool, bare to the eye of heaven,
I saw a man before me unawares,
The oldest man he seemed who ever wore grey hairs.

Now follows the simile :

As a huge stone is sometimes seen to lie
Couched on the bald top of an eminence ;
Wonder to all who do the same espy,
By what means it could thither come, and whence ;
So that it seems a thing endued with sense :
Like a sea-beast crawled forth, that on a shelf
Of rock or sand reposeth, there to sun itself ;
Such seemed this Man, not all alive nor dead,
Nor all at ease in his extreme old age :

The image of the stone and sea-beast, not beautiful nor arresting in themselves, are not developed independently. They act and react vitally upon each other, and upon the original conception of the still, solitary figure of the old man in the midst of bare nature. As the stanza moves on we are more and more conscious of that strange stillness of his which seems to suggest both death and life. Moreover the simile contributes—no analysis can quite show how—to the inwardness and deep spiritual meaning of the whole poem. The poet is left at the end with a sense of the indomitable, the wellnigh insuperable power of the human spirit revealed to him through his encounter with a derelict old leech-gatherer.”⁷

Conclusion

Resolution and Independence remains an entirely successful poem of Wordsworth. It is the most characteristic of his greater lyrics. “There can be no sort of doubt as to *Resolution and Independence*, probably, if we must choose, the most Wordsworthian of Wordsworth’s poems, and the best test of ability to understand him.”⁸

IV. OPINIONS OF CRITICS

1. It can scarcely be by chance that the landscape of *The Leech-Gatherer* is almost identical with that of the incident on Penrith Beacon—a wide and desolate moor, with a mountain tarn, and in each case, one solitary human figure. The leech-gatherer himself is likewise closely akin to two other figures who had helped to shape Wordsworth’s soul—the blind man seen in the streets of London on whom he had gazed

As if admonished from another world,

and the discharged soldier whom he had met in the moonlight on the road at Sawrey during his first long vacation, who told his soldier’s tale and answered Wordsworth’s questions with

a strange half-absence, as of one
Knowing too well the importance of his theme,
But feeling it no longer.

All these figures, and the leech-gatherer himself are invested with the atmosphere of what he called ‘visionary dreariness’, from which he was able to draw a strange inward strength and peace.

—Mary Moorman

2. In what seems to me his greatest, as it is certainly his most characteristic poem, ‘The Leech-Gatherer’, he has gathered up all his qualities, dignity, homeliness, meditation over man and nature, respectful pity for old age and poverty, detailed observation of

7. Helen Darbishire, *The Poet Wordsworth* (Oxford University Press/ London, 1950), pp. 168-69.

8. A.C. Bradley, *Oxford Lectures on Poetry* (Macmillan & Co. Ltd./London, 1964).

natural things, together with an imaginative atmosphere which melts, harmonises, the forms of cloud and rock and pool and the voices of wind and man into a single composition. Such concentration, with him, is rare ; but it is much less rare than is commonly supposed to find an almost perfect expression of a single mood or a single aspect of nature, as it has come to him in his search after everything that nature has to say to us or to show us.

—Arthur Symons

3. Though it is proper to refer to the *Prothalamion* as the nearest literary model, Wordsworth restores the archaic situation from which both his and Spenser's poems derive. Behind the dream-sight is the prophetic situation, the "chance" omen sent against a man whether or not he can interpret it. The uncertainties of interpretation in Wordsworth's case are remarkable ; I can only repeat that though a steadying recognition is gained from his meeting with the Leech-gatherer—an open meeting indeed, beside a pool "bare to the eye of heaven", and radically Protestant in its sense that nothing stands between man and man except God—the possibility of reversal, of recognition turning into peripety, is never absent. It can be urged that the poem's high point comes not at the end but at the beginning, when the heart is renewed toward nature and enters the recollected image.

—Geoffrey H. Hartman

4. It is an extraordinary and powerful work, with the same strange distance between meaning and argument that appears in passages of *The Prelude*. On one level, Wordsworth seems to be saying something like this : 'One day, while out for a walk, I fell into a mood of unaccountable depression and anxiety. Then I met an old leech-gatherer, who was so old and so poor and so much worse off than me that I felt guilty about feeling sorry for myself, and in future every time I start to feel sorry for myself I will think of that poor old man.' And in one way, this is precisely what Wordsworth does mean, but a crude summary like this misses out everything that makes the poem important. Once again, it is not the thought that counts, for the thought is trite enough ; it is the circumstances. It is the figure of the old man which makes the poem so remarkable. He is at once real and symbolic, a real old man and a portent of something else. It is his dignity more than his poverty that impresses Wordsworth ; he is very much the poet's superior in the virtues of resolution and independence mentioned in poem's title, and the poet feels awe and admiration for him, not pity.

He is not saying, 'Thank God I am not as badly off as he is', but rather hoping that he may bear whatever comes to him with like honour. The old man, like the black cliffs that towered above the boy Wordsworth in the stolen boat, or like the 'low breathings' that warned him off when he stole birds from other boys' snares, is a force of nature ; he impresses Wordsworth not by what he says but by what he is.

Margaret Drabble

V. NOTES

1. **There was a roaring in the wind all night**—The poet's sister thus describes the rough weather in her journal: "A very rainy or rather showery and gusty morning; but after the sun shines."

9. **The sky rejoices in the morning's birth**—The sky becomes bright and seems to be delighted at the break of dawn.

18. **Or heard them not, as happy as a boy**—"Whether I listened to them or not, I was happy."—*W.T. Webb*

21. **All the ways of men**—The meaningless talk and deeds of men which smack of vanity.

28. **Dim sadness—and blind thoughts**—Here the adjectives point to the vague and unintelligible nature of his sad feelings.

36-37. **My whole life I have lived in pleasant thought, / As if life's business were a summer mood**—Cf. Thomson: *Castle of Indolence* :

For never sun on living creature shone
Who more devout enjoyment with us took;
Here on his hours he hung as on a book,
On his own time here would he float away,
As doth a fly upon a summer brook.

38-39. **As if all needful things would come unsought / To genial faith, still rich in genial good**—"I take the sense to be 'a man who cheerfully trusts his providence, and is rich in kindness to all'." —*Cotteril*

43. **The marvellous Boy**—"There is particular poignancy in calling Chatterton 'the marvellous Boy', for 'The Prelude' makes boyhood for ever behind him, and so abandoning the hiding places of his power." —*Bloom*

44. **The sleepless Soul that perished in his pride**—Thomas Chatterton (1752-1770) took his own life in the despondency caused by the failure of his poetic ambition.

45. **Of Him who walked in glory and in joy**—Robert Burns. "During the years when Burns followed his plough along the mountain side, Mossfelf Farm, he was full of hope and vigour, but his later years were sad—for, as he himself says, 'Thoughtless follies laid him low, and stained his name.' His life was shortened by intemperance." —*Cotteril*

47. **By our own spirits are we deified**—"We poets imagine ourselves to be gods, asked above the ordinary human destiny of suffering and misfortune." —*Webb*

48-49. **We Poets in our youth begin in gladness;/But thereof come in the end despondency and madness—**Cf. Dryden, *Absalom and Achitophel*, Part I, 163-64 :

Great wits are sure to madness near allied,
And thin partitions do their bounds divide.

57. **As a huge stone—**Wordsworth observes : “The stone is endowed with something of the power of life to approximate it to the sea-beast ; and the sea-beast stripped of some of its vital qualities to assimilate it to the stone ; which intermediate image is thus treated for the purpose of bringing the original image, that of the stone, to a nearer resemblance to the figure and condition of the aged man, who is divested of so much of the indications of life and motion as to bring him to the point where the two objects unite and coalesce in just comparison.”

75. **Motionless as a cloud the old Man stood—**“This simile is also cited by Wordsworth as an example of poetic imagination and it does certainly stand one test of a truly imaginative creation, for it lives in one’s memory. But it is the picture of the great thunder-cloud, moving all together if it moves at all, which seems to me the living thing of beauty, not the simile ; which is quaint rather than strikingly appropriate.” —Cotteril

96-97. **A stately speech ;/Such as grave Livers do in Scotland use—**The old man spoke in a language which was beyond the reach of common men. It had the dignity which marks the speech of the Presbyterians of Scotland.

111-12. **Or like a man from some far region sent,/To give me human strength, by apt admonishment—**It seems to the poet as if the old man, an emblem of ‘resolution’ and ‘independence’, has been sent from the other world to rebuke him for his wilful sullenness in Nature’s sweet air.

122-23. **Stirring thus about his feet/The waters of the pools where they abide—**“Mr. Webb imagines the old man standing in the water with bare feet in order to allow the leeches to fasten on to them. Whether Wordsworth meant this or not, it is a fact that leeches are not easily caught except by some such device.”

—Cotteril

129-30. **In my mind’s eye I seemed to see him pace/About the weary moors continually—**In this mind’s eye, as opposed to his corporeal eye, the leech-gatherer paces continually and silently in his wandering solitude.

19

The Solitary Reaper

I. TEXT

Behold her, single in the field,
Yon solitary Highland Lass !
Reaping and singing by herself ;
Stop here, or gently pass !
Alone she cuts and binds the grain,
And sings a melancholy strain ;
O listen ! for the Vale profound
Is overflowing with the sound. 5

No Nightingale did ever chaunt
More welcome notes to weary bands
Of travellers in some shady haunt,
Among Arabian sands :
A voice so thrilling ne'er was heard
In spring-time from the Cuckoo-bird,
Breaking the silence of the seas
Among the farthest Hebrides. 10 15

Will no one tell me what she sings ?—
Perhaps the plaintive numbers flow
For old, unhappy, far-off things,
And battles long ago :
Or is it some more humble lay,
Familiar matter of to-day ?
Some natural sorrow, loss, or pain,
That has been, and may be again ? 20

Whate'er the theme, the Maiden sang
As if her song could have no ending ;
I saw her singing at her work,
And o'er the sickle bending ;—
I listened, motionless and still ;
And, as I mounted up the hill
The music in my heart I bore,
Long after it was heard no more. 25 30

II. SUMMARY

A highland girl is all alone in the field. She is reaping and singing by herself. The poet asks the passerby to stop or gently pass without disturbing her. She is reaping the harvest and binding the sheaves alone. And the notes of her melancholy song are resounding in the deep valley. (Stanza I)

The song of the girl is sweeter to the poet than that of the nightingale to the tired travellers who take rest in the oasis of the Arabian desert. To the poet the girl's song seems more thrilling than the cuckoo's song heard in spring time in the silent seas of the remotest Hebrides. (Stanza II)

The poet asks someone to tell him the theme of the girl's song because the language in which she is singing is incomprehensible to him. As there is no one to interpret the song to the poet, he guesses that the melancholy song of the girl might be connected with unhappy incidents or battles of the past. He further guesses that the song might be about some misfortunes of everyday life of sorrows which come out of the natural course of things. (Stanza III)

Whatever might have been the subject-matter of the girl's song, it appeared to the poet that she would go on singing for ever. The girl was singing at her work. The poet remained motionless and still while the song was going on. The melody of the song remained enshrined in the heart of the poet long after it had stopped. (Stanza IV)

III. CRITICAL ESTIMATE

Introduction

Wordsworth's Scottish tour in the autumn of 1803 produced some beautiful poems. *The Solitary Reaper* is one of them. It is one of Wordsworth's most famous lyrics.

Source

Wordsworth said in a note that 'this Poem was suggested by a beautiful sentence in a MS. Tour in Scotland written by a Friend'. The reference is to Thomas Wilkinson's *Tours to the British Mountains*, published in 1824; and the words are: "Passed a female, who was reaping alone: she sung in Erse, as she bended over her sickle; the sweetest human voice I ever heard; her strains were tenderly melancholy, and felt delicious long after they were heard no more."

Subject-matter

Wordsworth records in this poem his reaction to an ordinary incident. What others might have passed by produces a strong emotional response in him. His response rather than the image causing it is his subject here. After expressing the fact that he is deeply moved, he allows the emotion its own life and delights in new accesses of thought and feeling.

"The question why the poet is moved is subordinated to the fact *that* he is moved, that his mind overflows under the influence of song. While the poem begins with a girl who is alone in her work and in her song, which is not expressly for others but which she sings to herself, she and her song reach across the valley to halt the traveller, who then resumes his journey with music in his heart. The last lines of the poem,

The music in my heart I bore,
Long after it was heard no more.

have a literal and an extended meaning, which collaborate to express response, repercussion, overflow. The poet heard the girl inwardly after he had passed out of actual range of hearing (the literal import), yet the 'long after' may be taken to reach to the moment of composition two years later. 'The Solitary Reaper' is evidence that the song has survived in his heart."¹

Theme of Solitude

Bradley rightly observes : "The editor of the *Golden Treasury*, a book never to be thought of without gratitude, changed the title *The Solitary Reaper* into *The Highland Reaper*. He may have had his reasons. Perhaps he had met some one who thought that the Reaper belonged to Surrey. Still the change was a mistake : the 'solitary' in Wordsworth's title gave the keynote."

"The human figure is seen in its beautiful setting, as we see things in a dream : solitude is set to a lovely verbal music in a lyrical stanza :

Behold her, single in the field,
Yon solitary Highland lass !
Reaping and singing by herself ;
Stop here or gently pass !
Alone she cuts and binds the grain,
And sings a melancholy strain :
O listen ! for the vale profound
Is overflowing with the sound.

The note of solitude sounds and swells through this opening stanza till it fills our mind as her song fills the deep valley. She is single in the field, solitary, singing by herself, alone :

O listen ! for the Vale profound
Is overflowing with the sound."²

Communion between Man and Nature

Wordsworth is not a regular landscape-poet, not as he is sometimes thought to be, a descriptive poet—at least, that is not his primary concern. *The Solitary Reaper* brings out what was almost

1. Geoffrey H. Hartman, *Wordsworth's Poetry 1787-1814* (Yale University Press/New Haven, 1967), p. 7.

2. Helen Darbishire, *The Poet Wordsworth* (Oxford University Press / London, 1950), p. 62.

THE SOLITARY REAPER

always in Wordsworth's mind, the communion between Man and Nature. As W.P. Ker puts it : "What he sees is not the landscape only, but the landscape as it is for the people who live in it. The Solitary Reaper, the Highland woman reaping and singing, is the voice of the whole land. And this comes out in the same way in the voice of the cuckoo, 'a voice so thrilling' being the voice of the spring time in a world which seems to be proof against the charm of spring ; 'the silence of the seas'—what have the seas to do in renewing life ? The voice of the cuckoo is the triumph of the new voice of the year over the desert of waters. This is the divination of Wordsworth."

Romantic Imagination

This poem is not based on Wordsworth's personal experience ; he did not see the Solitary Reaper, did not hear her song. *The Solitary Reaper* is imaginative in the ordinary trivial sense ; he had got the idea from a friend's record and re-created the reality for himself.

The poem is an expression of the supervening consciousness, which Wordsworth names Imagination in *The Prelude* VI. As Geoffrey H. Hartman puts it : "The effects of 'Imagination' are always the same : a moment of arrest, the ordinary vital continuum being interrupted ; a separation of the traveller-poet from familiar nature ; a thought of death or judgment or of the reversal of what is taken to be the order of nature ; a feeling of solitude or loss or separation.

Not all of these need be present at the same time, and some are obliquely present. But the most important consequence is the poem itself, whose developing structure is an expressive reaction to this consciousness. The poem transforms static into continuous by a gradual crescendo which is the obverse of the fixating initial shock. The Highland girl, a single, lonely figure, startles Wordsworth into an exceptionally strong self-consciousness, yet no stark feelings enter a poem which mellows them from the beginning. The poem here is on the side of 'nature' and against the 'imagination' which fathered it ; it hides the intense and even apocalyptic self-consciousness from which it took its rise ; it is generically a veiling of its source."

Note of Melancholy

In *The Solitary Reaper* we find a *penseroso* element that sinks toward melancholy. It is recognizably cognate with the Epitaph. As Geoffrey H. Hartman puts it : "Wordsworth's poem is linked to the epitaph, though we do not know immediately what valour or virtue it mourns, and though it is strange that a harvest scene should suggest this memento more to the poet. The traveller-man, the secular pilgrim—is halted by an affecting image. And something peculiar in the image, or the suspension itself of habitual motion, or an-ensuring, meditative consciousness brings him into the shadow

of death. That shadow is lightened or subsumed as the poem proceeds, and the unusual image pointing like an epitaph to the passerby is transformed into a more internal inscription testifying of continuance rather than death : 'The music in my heart I bore,/ Long after it was heard no more'."

Language and Imagery

In this poem the artificial language of neo-classical poetry has been described, and simple language has been employed. It illustrates Wordsworth's theory that simple and common words should be used in poetry. There are many suggestive lines and words in the poem. Two lines of it are of the purest Romantic gold. They are

For old, unhappy, far-off things,
And battles long ago.

In the second stanza of the poem Wordsworth has employed two beautiful images of Nature. Two contrasted images suggest Nature's vastness and solitude—one, vivid, dynamic, vibrating with life ; the other, desolate, lonesome, wrapped in mystery.

Conclusion

With its simplicity, suggestiveness, pathos and verbal music, *The Solitary Reaper* remains a very delightful lyric. It is not only one of the best of Wordsworth's best poems, but one of the most wonderful lyrics in the whole of literature.

IV. NOTES

1. **Behold her, single in the field.** Dorothy Wordsworth observes : "It is not uncommon in the more lovely parts of the highlands to see a single person so employed."

4. **Stop here, or gently pass.** Geoffrey H. Hartman observes : "Such a line as 'Stop here, or gently pass' is directed in theme and format against the purely determinate. The line contains, in fact, one of the many 'fluidifying' doublings of this poem ('Reaping and singing', 'cuts and binds', 'Things and battles', 'Perhaps. . . or')."

6. **A melancholy strain.** It is interesting to note that Thomas Wilkinson's *Tour in Scotland*, which suggested the poem to Wordsworth, contains the following passage :

"Passed a female who was reaping alone ; she sung in Erse as she bended over her sickle ; the sweetest human voice I ever heard ; her strains were *tenderly melancholy* and felt delicious, long after they were heard no more."

7. **The Vale profound.** The deep valley.

10. **Welcome notes.** Refreshing songs.

11. **Some shady haunt.** An oasis in the Arabian desert.

15. **Breaking the silence of the seas.** Cf. Coleridge, *The Ancient Mariner* :

And we did speak only to break
The silence of the sea.

16. **The farthest Hebrides.** A cluster of islands to the north-west of Scotland, reckoned as the northern limits of the world.

17. **Will no one tell me what she sings ?** As the girl was singing in her own Highland dialect, the poet could not understand her.

20. **Battles long ago.** The poet guessed that the melancholy song of the girl might be connected with the battles described in ancient Scottish ballad-poetry.

22. **Familiar matter of to-day.** Ordinary misfortunes of everyday life.

32. **Long after it was heard no more.** The poet remembered the sweet melody of the song long after it had stopped. Cf. Wordsworth, *The Daffodils* :

They flash upon that inward eye
Which is the bliss of solitude.

Pradhan Kishan Datta
M.A. (Pol. Sc. Eco. Lit. & L.H.) B.Ed.
Motiyar Rainawari
SRINAGER-190003
JAMSHEDPUR

20

Composed Upon Westminster Bridge

I. TEXT

Earth has not anything to show more fair :
 Dull would he be of soul who could pass by
 A sight so touching in its majesty :
 This City now doth, like a garment, wear
 The beauty of the morning ; silent, bare, 5
 Ships, towers, domes, theatres, and temples lie
 Open unto the fields, and to the sky ;
 All bright and glittering in the smokeless air.
 Never did sun more beautifully steep
 In his first splendour, valley, rock, or hill ; 10
 Ne'er saw I, never felt, a calm so deep !
 The river glideth at his own sweet will :
 Dear God ! the very houses seem asleep ;
 And all that mighty heart is lying still !

II. SUBSTANCE

The sight of London in the light of the morning sun excels any other beautiful scene of the earth. He who remains untouched by such a grand and impressive sight is dead to all senses of beauty. Now the city is clothed in the bright light of the morning as with a garment. Ships, towers, domes, play-houses and churches can now be seen spreading into the horizon and becoming one with the surrounding fields and the sky above. As the air is free from smoke, all objects of the city look bright and shining.

The rays of the rising sun never fell so beautifully on the valleys, rocks, or hills as they fell on London that day. The poet has not experienced such a wonderful quietness in the atmosphere at any other time. The Thames is moving freely without being disturbed by boats and ships. It appears to the poet that even the houses are asleep. He feels that the mighty heart of London has stopped beating and it is lying calm and quiet.

III. CRITICAL ESTIMATE

Introduction

Wordsworth said, late in life, that *Composed Upon Westminster Bridge* was 'written on the roof of a coach, on my way to France'. This statement does not agree with the date 'September 3, 1802'. We know from Dorothy's Journal that they crossed Westminster Bridge on their way to France in the early morning of July 31. But they were back in London from August 31 to September 22. Perhaps this sonnet was cast in its final form on September 3.

Picture of London

As a poet of Nature Wordsworth was allergic towards the commercial life of London. The bewilderment of London taught him to recognize with an intense joy such fragments of things rustic, such aspects of things eternal, as were to be found amidst that rush and roar.

In *Composed Upon Westminster Bridge* we find Wordsworth as the poet of London considered as London, but of London considered as a part of the country. Here "nature has reasserted her dominion over the works of all the multitude of men ; and in the early clearness the poet beholds the great City—as Sterling imagined it on his dyeing-bed—'not as full of noise and dust and confusion, but as something silent, grand and everlasting'."¹

Sense of Solitude

In this poem we find Wordsworth as a poet of solitude also. For him all solitude and all solitary things had an extraordinary fascination. The sonnet breathes the calm depth, the pervading majesty of silence that descend on Nature's dawn. Nowhere has the poet ever experienced so intensely the sensation of utter solitude as at the sight of the vast city lying in the bright sunlight. As he says,

Ne'er saw I, never felt, a calm so deep !
The river glideth at his own sweet will ;
Dear God ! the very houses seem asleep ;
And all that mighty heart is lying still !

Wordsworthian Imagination

"Imagination", Wordsworth says, "is. . . that chemical faculty by which elements of the *most different* nature and *distant* origin are blended together into one harmonious and homogeneous whole." The sight of London he held from Westminster Bridge as described in the sonnet finely illustrates this theory of Imagination. As Melvin Rader puts it : "Here is no aggregate built up stepwise by the association of simple constituents, nor a serial order either logical or causal. Rather there is an intense emotional synthesis achieved in

a single moment of intuition—the vision of a great city wrapped in a calm so deep that its mighty heart is almost suspended.”

Dorothy's Description

Dorothy's description of the scene is the best comment on the sonnet: “We mounted the Dover coach at Charing Cross. It was a beautiful morning. The City, St. Paul's, with the river, and a multitude of little boats, made a most beautiful sight as we crossed Westminster Bridge. The houses were not over-hung by the cloud of smoke and they were spread out endlessly, yet the sun shone so brightly, with such a fierce light, that there was even something like the purity of one of nature's own grand spectacles.”

Language and Imagery

This sonnet is a fine example of Wordsworth's simple and natural poetic diction. In it a chaste diction and a simplicity of utterance are wedded to the beauty of the images. Here the images of the sun and the river are so fresh that they appear to be the report of something actually seen.

Conclusion

Composed Upon Westminster Bridge remains one of the most delightful sonnets of Wordsworth. We turn to this sonnet again and again because it shows a return to Wordsworth's early freshness of response to landscape.

IV. NOTES

1. **Earth has not anything to show more fair**—No scene in the world is so beautiful as the sight of the city of London in the early morning.

2-3. **Dull would he be of soul who could pass by/A sight so touching in its majesty**—He who passes by without being moved at the sight of the great city wrapped up in sleep has no heart to appreciate the beautiful sights and sounds of Nature.

4. **Like a garment**—The city is clothed in the bright light of the morning as with a garment. Cf. Psalms, CIV, 2: “who coverest thyself with light as with a garment.”

6. **Towers, domes**—The poet is probably referring to the Tower of London and the dome of St. Paul's.

Temples—“Used as indicating a less narrow and more general notion than churches.” —*Webb*

9. **Steep**—“The sun is compared to liquid dye, which transforms the various objects that are placed in it. . . Wordsworth is surprised that a city should be as susceptible of the transforming influence of the sun as the more beautiful works of Nature.”

11. **A calm so deep**—The calm is felt so deeply because it offers a sharp contrast to the usual tumult and confusion of the city.

12. **The river glideth at his own sweet will**—Now there is nothing to disturb the natural flow of the river. It is interesting to note how Wordsworth personifies the river and attributes to it the joy of volition.

13. **Dear God**—The exclamation shows the feeling of joy and wonder which the poet experienced. Cf.

Great God ! I'd rather be
A Pagan suckled in a creed outworn.

Wordsworth : *The World is Too Much With Us*, lines 9-10

14. **That mighty heart**—“London, which is the capital of the country, and the centre of its energies, is compared to the heart, which sets going the physical organism.” —*Clara L. Thomson*

21

To Milton (London, 1802)

I. TEXT

Milton ! thou should'st be living at this hour :
 England hath need of thee : she is a fen
 Of stagnant waters : altar, sword, and pen,
 Fireside, the heroic wealth of hall and bower, 5
 Have forfeited their ancient English dower
 Of inward happiness. We are selfish men ;
 Oh ! raise us up, return to us again ;
 And give us manners, virtue, freedom, power.
 Thy soul was like a Star, and dwelt apart :
 Thou hadst a voice whose sound was like the sea : 10
 Pure as the naked heavens, majestic, free,
 So didst thou travel on life's common way,
 In cheerful godliness ; and yet thy heart
 The lowliest duties on herself did lay.

II. SUBSTANCE

The poet wishes that Milton should have been living in England in the early part of the nineteenth century when English life has become as unwholesome as the stagnant water in a low-marshy place. All categories of people—the priests, the soldiers, the writers and the aristocrats—have lost their spiritual happiness. They have become self-centred. So the poet wishes that Milton should return and make the English people courteous, virtuous, freedom-loving and powerful.

Milton maintained a dignified aloofness from people who had unclean ways of life. His voice was as powerful as the roaring waves of the sea. His character was spotless like the cloudless sky. He led the cheerful life of a common man with abiding faith in God, and never shrank from doing the lowliest things if circumstances so required.

III. CRITICAL ESTIMATE

Introduction

To Milton (London, 1802) is a famous sonnet of Wordsworth. It was written during the same visit to London as inspired *Written in*

London, September, 1802 ('O Friend ! I know not which way I must look'). In it Wordsworth has paid a warm tribute to Milton, the prince of Puritans, as well as of poets.

Background

In a note appended to this sonnet Wordsworth wrote : "This was written immediately on my return from France to London when I could not but be struck, as here described, with the vanity and pride of our country, especially in great towns and cities, as contrasted with the quiet, and I may say the desolation that the Revolution had produced in France. This must be borne in mind or else the reader may think that in this and the succeeding sonnets I have exaggerated the mischiefs engendered and fostered among us by undistributed wealth."

"Wordsworth, a poor man who had earlier suffered injustice from a rich man and was in any case most frugal in his private habits—'a simple, water-drinking bard'—broke forth into verse which has something of the ring and sting of Old Testament prophecy."¹

Criticism of Life

Like *The World is Too Much With Us, To Milton (London, 1802)* is also 'a criticism of life'. In it Wordsworth's meditations are about the state of England's 'soul'. Compared with the heroic age of 'plain living and high thinking', England is now 'a fen of stagnant waters'. The poet's countrymen have forgotten their great traditions and high ideals, and have fallen upon evil days. Only a moralist like Milton can uplift them. "The Puritan ideal of life, austere and simple, had a natural attraction for Wordsworth. To this he added his own devotion to Milton, the prince of Puritans, as well as of poets."²

Tribute to Milton

This sonnet besides being 'a criticism of life', is a warm tribute to Milton. Wordsworth was a great admirer of Milton.

In this poem he has given a faithful picture of Milton's character and personality in words full of reverence :

Thy soul was like a Star, and dwelt apart ;
Thou hadst a voice whose sound was like the sea :
Pure as the naked heavens, majestic, free,
So didst thou travel on life's common way,
In cheerful godliness ; and yet thy heart
The lowliest duties on herself did lay.

Style and Imagery

This sonnet is noteworthy for its neat structure and technical perfection. It is written in a very compact style. Here the poet is

1. Mary Moorman, *William Wordsworth—The Early Years 1770-1803* (Oxford University Press/London, 1957), p. 569.

2. *Ibid*, p. 570.

at once concise and dignified, and yet he says straight out the particular emotion which was possessing him. The poem is shot through with beautiful images of stars, sea and 'the naked heavens'.

Conclusion

Wordsworth's tribute to Milton in this sonnet frequently reminds us of Arnold's homage to Shakespeare in his famous sonnet *Shakespeare*. It is not merely among the glories of Wordsworth, it is among the glories of English poetry.

IV. NOTES

2-3. **She is a fen of stagnant waters**—According to Wordsworth, life in England is not running in a healthy manner. The English people have become indifferent to ideals of liberty, nobility and simplicity.

4. **Hall and bower**—"The hall and bower were the two living-rooms which composed the chief part of the English dwelling-house from very early times and continued to be the nucleus of the plan of the larger houses until the middle of the seventeenth century. The hall was the common room of the household, while the bower was the private room of the master of the house and the withdrawing-room of the ladies. In process of time, the latter word was specially applied to a room used by the ladies of the household; and in this passage 'hall and bower' are used as symbols of the conditions under which masculine and feminine virtues have grown up in England."—*A. Hamilton Thompson*.

5. **Dower**—It means that part of the husband's property which his widow is entitled to enjoy during her life-time. Here it means the old tradition of the English people.

10. **Thou hadst a voice whose sound was like the sea**—This line refers to Milton's powerful blank verse which has been aptly compared to the thunderous roar of the sea.

11. **The naked heavens**—The cloudless sky. Cf. *Ode on Intimations of Immortality*, 12-13 :

The Moon doth with delight
Look round her when the heavens are bare.

14. **The lowliest duties**—Perhaps this is a reference to the fact of Milton's doing the work of shoe-repairing in a dark corner of his house in Listers Street in 1642, when London was attacked by the Royalist army. Milton never ignored the ordinary duties of everyday life.

The World is Too Much with Us

I. TEXT

THE world is too much with us ; late and soon,
 Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers :
 Little we see in Nature that is ours ;
 We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon !
 This Sea that bares her bosom to the moon ; 5
 The winds that will be howling at all hours,
 And are up-gathered now like sleeping flowers ;
 For this, for everything, we are out of tune ;
 It moves us not.—Great God ! I'd rather be
 A Pagan suckled in a creed outworn ; 10
 So might I, standing on this pleasant lea,
 Have glimpses that would make me less forlorn ;
 Have sight of Proteus rising from the sea ;
 Or hear old Triton blow his wreathed horn.

II. SUBSTANCE

The poet says that the people of his age are busy amassing wealth and spending the same at all hours of the day. In this way they lose their spiritual power. They cannot say that they are interested in certain objects of Nature. They have sold their hearts to the god of wealth and have no feelings left for enjoying the beauties of Nature. They do not have any love for the sight of moonlight falling on the surface of the sea or the picture of the winds which make tumultuous noise throughout the day but sleep like flowers at night, nor have they any liking for other lovely aspects of Nature.

The people of his age are not at all moved by the beautiful objects of Nature. The poet wants to be nurtured in the extinct creed of paganism. As a pagan the poet would have the opportunity of witnessing the sights of pagan gods like Proteus and Triton.

III. CRITICAL ESTIMATE

Introduction

Arnold observes : "His (Wordsworth's) best work is in his shorter pieces and many indeed are there of these which are of first-rate excellence." *The World is Too Much with Us* is certainly one of these 'shorter pieces'. In it we find Wordsworth's remarkable merits as a sonneteer.

Criticism of Life

This sonnet is a good example of Wordsworth's meditative poetry. "Within its brief compass it implies a judgment upon the quality of modern civilization—its poverty of imagination, the stuffiness of its creeds, the rush and push of its public life. We are invited to live in harmony with nature and to renounce 'the fretful stir Unprofitable, and the fever of the world'. In the richness of its values and the range of its ideas this is a large poem, although it numbers only fourteen lines. It is what Matthew Arnold called 'a criticism of life'."¹

Love of Nature

This sonnet reveals Wordsworth's love for quiet scenes of Nature. In it the poet has given two beautiful pictures of Nature. One is the picture of the sea bathed in moonlight ; the other is the picture of the winds that sleep like flowers at night :

The sea that bares her bosom to the moon ;
The winds that will be howling at all hours,
And are up-gathered now like sleeping flowers.

Influence of Ancient Legends

It is interesting to note in what manner Wordsworth was affected by the Nature-deities of Greece and Rome—impersonations which have preserved through so many centuries so strange a charm. In this sonnet the baseness and materialism of modern life drives the poet back on whatsoever of illumination and reality lay in that young ideal :

Great God ! I'd rather be
A Pagan suckled in a creed outworn ;
So might I, standing on this pleasant lea,
Have glimpses that would make me less forlorn ;
Have sight of Proteus rising from the sea ;
Or hear old Triton blow his wreathed horn.

"Even when Wordsworth turns away from 'the common growth of mother-earth' to write of ancient legend, of Proteus rising from the sea or old Triton blowing his wreathed horn, it is not without comment upon the goings-on of life."²

1, 2. Melvin Rader, *Wordsworth—A Philosophical Approach* (Oxford University Press, London, 1967), p. 203.

Style

This sonnet is written in a dignified style. Here Wordsworth is at once concise and dignified and yet he says straight out the particular message which was possessing him. He has chosen the words with unusual care and with an attention to their sound as well as to their meaning.

Conclusion

This sonnet is thoroughly representative of Wordsworth's poetic genius. It is worthy of Shakespeare or Milton, unsurpassable, perfect, equalled only by *Let me not to the marriage of true minds* and its few compeers.

IV. NOTES

1. **The world is too much with us**—We are always busy running after the material pleasures of life.

2. **Getting and spending we lay waste our powers**—We lose our spiritual power by devoting all our time and energy to the pursuits of wealth.

4. **A sordid boon**—Material gains.

8. **We are out of tune**—We cannot recognize our kinship with the beautiful objects of Nature.

10. **A Pagan suckled in a creed outworn**—"Wordsworth would rather be a pagan brought up in a creed that is now obsolete, and keep the close sense of communion with Nature that is possessed by primitive people, than be so much taken up with worldly things as the Englishmen of his day."—*Clara L. Thomson*.

13. **Proteus**—In Greek mythology Proteus was a sea god. He was endowed with the gift of prophecy.

14. **Triton**—He was the son of Poseidon and Amphitrite. He could soothe the restless waves of the sea by blowing a shell.

23

A Night-Piece

I. TEXT

—The sky is overcast:
 With a continuous cloud of texture close,
 Heavy and wan, all whitened by the Moon,
 Which through that veil is indistinctly seen,
 A dull, contracted circle, yielding light 5
 So feebly spread, that not a shadow falls,
 Chequering the ground—from rock, plant, tree, or tower.
 At length a pleasant instantaneous gleam
 Startles the pensive traveller while he treads
 His lonesome path, with unobserving eye 10
 Bent earthwards ; he looks up—the clouds are split
 Asunder,—and above his head he sees
 The clear Moon, and the glory of the heavens.
 There, in a black-blue vault she sails along,
 Followed by multitudes of stars, that small 15
 And sharp, and bright, along the dark abyss
 Drive as she drives : how fast they wheel away,
 Yet vanish not ! —the wind is in the tree,
 But they are silent ; —still they roll along
 Immeasurably distant ; and the vault, 20
 Built round by those white clouds, enormous clouds,
 Still deepens its unfathomable depth.
 At length the Vision closes, and the mind,
 Not undisturbed by the delight it feels,
 Which slowly settles into peaceful calm, 25
 Is left to muse upon the solemn scene.

II. SUBSTANCE

The sky is overcast with a heavy and thick cloud, dimly illuminated by the moon, which may be indistinctly seen behind it as a dull, contracted circle. The moon light is so dim that it does not cause any shadows. The poet thoughtfully treads along his lonesome path. His eyes are bent downwards. Instantaneously, there

appears a pleasant gleam in the sky. Astonished, he looks up and is pleasantly surprised to see that the clouds have split asunder and the clear moon is brightly shining in the glory of heavens. In the black-blue vault of the sky, the moon sails along, followed by small but sharp and bright stars. The clouds lend their motion both to the moon and the stars. In fact, the stars appear to be wheeling away quite fast, but they do not disappear from the sight. The wind blowing through the trees produces a rustling sound, but the stars are absolutely quiet. The vault built by the clouds gets deeper still, and the stars, immeasurably distant, keep rolling away. The poet feels immensely delighted by this vision. Ultimately, when the vision is over, he settles down into a peaceful calm and begins to muse upon the solemnity of the scene.

III. CRITICAL ESTIMATE

Introduction

A Night-Piece is one of the earliest nature poems of *Lyrical Ballads*. It was written in 1798. Wordsworth seems to be at his best while describing a changing night scene, for he succeeds in depicting the scene with all its minute details.

The Dim, Cloudy Sky

The poem may be divided into two parts. In the first part, the poet describes a heavily overcast sky. The cloud is 'continuous', is of 'close texture' and looks 'heavy and wan'. It is whitened by the moon. The moon itself can be seen as a 'dull, contracted circle' behind the veil of the cloud. The moonlight is there, but it is too feeble to cause shadows. The whole scene appears to be heavy and gloomy. The poet treads along his lonesome path. There does not seem to be anything in nature to catch his attention and to relieve him of his gloom. So his eyes are bent earthwards and he moves on in a pensive mood.

The Bright Moon in a Glorious Sky

Suddenly the scene changes. A pleasant instantaneous gleam startles the poet and he looks up. And wonder of wonders, the cloud has split itself into two and a bright and clear moon is shining in the glory of heavens. Then the moon sails along in a black-blue vault, followed by multitudes of stars. Both the moon and the stars appear to be sailing. The stars are small, but they are sharp and bright. They wheel away very fast but do not quite vanish from the sight. The vault built by the white enormous clouds gets deeper. The stars seem to be far away in the vault. But they roll along.

At length, the vision is over. It was a delightful experience and the poet could not have been undisturbed by the joy offered by it. But it is 'the joy of the elevated thoughts' that disturbs him.

Gradually this joy settles into peaceful calm and he is left to muse upon the solemn scene he has just watched.

Beautiful Descriptions of Nature

A Night-Piece excels in beautiful descriptions of nature. The poet is able to describe the dullness and gloom caused by the heavy and wan cloud as well as the bright moon and the small and sharp stars shining in the deep vault of heaven with equal felicity. In the first part, the unobserving eye of the poet bent earthwards emphasises the gloominess of the atmosphere. In the second, he talks of being 'disturbed' by the joyful scene. It suggests the intensity of happiness the scene offered him. The descriptions are so graphic that no details, howsoever minute, seem to have escaped the poet. The moonlight in the first part is so feeble that no shadows fall on the ground to chequer it. In the second part, he presents two contrasting sights: the rustling leaves and the quiet stars. These details bring to the poem a rare quality of vividness.

Symbolic Value

The two contrasted scenes in the poem have their symbolic value also. They symbolise the transformation in Wordsworth's mental and poetic outlook. The first scene is emblematic of the morbid gloom that Wordsworth had been experiencing earlier; the second scene represents the radiant light and the peaceful calm of *Lyrical Ballads*.

IV. NOTES

2. **A continuous cloud**—there is just one continuous cloud in the sky with no gaps in it. The cloud is present not in the form of flakes, but as a single continuous piece. **Of texture close**—thickly woven.

3. **Wan**—pale, may be even dark and gloomy. The moon is there behind the cloud, but the cloud is so thick that it is only inadequately illumined by the moon.

4. **Which through...seen**—The moon behind the veil of the cloud cannot be seen clearly. **Indistinctly**—not clearly.

5. **A dull, contracted circle**—Normally the moon is surrounded by a halo of light. It appears to be swimming in a pool of light. But now the moon being behind the cloud, the halo is missing and the moon has been reduced to a dull, contracted circle. **Contracted**—shrunk in size.

5-7. **Yielding light...or tower**—The moonlight is so dim that no shadows fall on the ground from rocks, plants, trees, or towers, to produce criss-cross patterns on it.

8. **A pleasant instantaneous gleam**—a delightful flash of light appearing suddenly.

9. **Startles**—surprises. **Pensive**—thoughtful. **Traveller**—most probably, the poet himself who may have become thoughtful on account of the gloom prevailing all around him.

9-10. **While he treads...path**—as he moves along slowly, wearily along a lonely path. The poet's loneliness may also have made him pensive.

10-11. **Unobserving...earthwards**—There is nothing beautiful in nature to catch the attention of the poet. So his eyes are bent earthwards. And he moves along his path, oblivious of his surroundings.

11. **He looks up**—This seems to be quite a dramatic change. Something must have happened suddenly to startle him and make him look up.

11-12. **The clouds are...asunder**—The clouds are split into two. **Asunder**...apart, into parts.

12-17. As the clouds split apart, the clear moon appears in the glory of the heavens. She sails along in the black-blue vault of the sky. She is followed by multitudes of stars that look small but sharp and bright. As the moon moves in the dark sky, they also follow her. **Vault**—a chamber with an arched roof. **Abyss**—a bottomless gulf.

17-18. **How fast...vanish not**—The stars move away very fast but do not totally disappear from the sight.

18-19. **The wind...silent**—These words present two contrasted sights. The wind is blowing through the trees and producing a rustling sound. But the stars appear to be absolutely silent.

20. **Immeasurably distant**—very far away.

20-22. **And the vault...depth**—The vault built by the huge white clouds gets deeper. **Enormous**—huge. **Unfathomable**—immeasurable.

23. **At length...closes**—Ultimately this vision is over.

23-26. **And the mind...solemn scene**—The poet's mind is at first disturbed by the joy the scene has given him. But gradually a kind of peaceful calm settles on his mind and he begins to muse upon the solemnity of the scene.

24. **Not undisturbed...feels**—In the beginning the poet's mind feels disturbed by the ecstatic happiness the sight of the bright moon swimming in the dark lake of the sky offered him. Love as he did nature, it was quite natural for the poet not to remain

untouched by the glory of the scene. He describes it in *Tintern Abbey* also :

And I have felt
A presence that disturbs me with the joy
Of elevated thoughts.....

25. **Which slowly...calm**—Gradually this feeling of joy gives way to another feeling of peaceful calm. He regains his serenity.

26. **Is left...scene**—As the poet's mind regains its serenity, he begins to ponder over the meaning of this changing scene and other related issues.

It Is a Beauteous Evening, Calm and Free

I. TEXT

It is a beauteous eveing, calm and free,
 The holy time is quiet as a Nun
 Breathless with adoration ; the broad sun
 Is sinking down in its tranquillity ;
 The gentleness of heaven broods o'er the Sea : 5
 Listen ! the mighty Being is awake,
 And doth with his eternal motion make
 A sound like thunder—everlastingly.
 Dear Child ! dear Girl ! that walkest with me here,
 If thou appear untouched by solemn thought 10
 Thy nature is not therefore less divine :
 Thou liest in Abraham's bosom all the year ;
 And worship'st at the Temple's inner shrine,
 God being with thee when we know it not.

II. SUBSTANCE

The serene and beautiful evening appears to be quiet like a nun absorbed in profound divine thoughts. The sun is sinking in all its quietness. The sky looms over the earth like a ceiling. It is quiet all around, but the supreme power God makes His presence felt in the thunderous sound produced by the ceaseless tossing of the waves. The poet's daughter, accompanying him at this time, seems to be untouched by the beauty of the evening. But it does not mean that her nature is less divine. She is ever in the company of the immortal spirit. Her soul is naturally reverent. In its subconscious form, it retains a sense of the divine presence.

III. CRITICAL ESTIMATE

Introduction

This exquisite sonnet, in the Petrarchan form, was composed on the beach near Calais, in France, in the autumn of 1802. The poet was walking up and down on the beach in the company of Carolin, his natural daughter by Annette Vallon. He was deeply

moved by the beauty of the quiet sunset contrasted with the tumultuous roar of the ceaselessly tossing waves. The whole scene seems to have cast a magic spell on his mind and inspired him to compose this sonnet, beautiful in its descriptions of nature, flawless in its technique.

The Octet : the Description of the Beautiful Sunset

In the first eight lines of the sonnet, the poet describes a scene of extraordinary splendour and beauty. The atmosphere is calm and free. On the western horizon, the broad disc of the sun is gradually sinking into the sea. The gentle shades of the evening sky are spreading over the sky like a ceiling. It is a holy time, feels the poet, holy like a nun immersed in deep divine thoughts. The Divine spirit is manifest all around and makes its presence felt in the thunderous sound of the waves tossing about, everlastingly. This picture of the calm and beautiful sunset favourably compares with the picture of a beautiful and tranquil sunrise in *Composed Upon Westminster Bridge* and the description of a calm evening in *Composed Upon an Evening of Extraordinary Splendour and Beauty*.

Wordsworth is adept in conveying the sense of quietness, of peace and tranquillity, and in this sonnet he does it superbly by presenting the images of the nun 'breathless with adoration' and the 'gentleness of heaven' 'brooding' over the sea. His pantheistic belief that nature is the manifestation of a Divine spirit is expressed in the last three lines of this section in which the poet interprets the sound produced by the waves as the voice of the 'mighty being'.

The Sestet : the Child's Attitude Towards Nature

While the poet is overcome by a sense of sacredness in the scene around him, his little daughter Carolin scampers about 'untouched by solemn thought'. She couldn't have been unimpressed by the beauty of the scene, but she does not seem to be sharing the philosophic beliefs of the poet. She enjoys the beauty but does not look to be solemn. She moves about as if nature were her playmate. As the poet muses over the whole issue, he concludes that the absence of solemnity in the child does not suggest that her nature is less divine. Childhood is endowed with a sanctity and purity of its own. All the year round, the child lies in 'Abraham's bosom', the blissful place where the departed souls of the blessed people find rest. God is always with her, though she may not be conscious of it. Her soul is naturally pure and it keeps with it its sub-conscious sense of the divine presence. The child may just be playing in the dust, but to the poet she is offering worship at the inner shrine of Solomon's Temple.

IV. NOTES

2-3. **The holy time is quiet...adoration**—The calm evening and the peaceful sky are being compared to the image of a holy Nun deeply absorbed in Divine thoughts. **Adoration**—divine thoughts.

The holy time—the calm and peaceful evening.

3-4. **The broad sun...tranquillity**—The sun is setting in all its calmness. **Tranquillity**—calmness, peacefulness.

5. **The gentleness...sea**—The gentle sky of the evening appears to be spreading over the sea like a ceiling.

6. **The mighty Being...the sea**—An example of personification.

7-8. **And doth with his eternal motion...thunder**—The waves of the ocean keep on tossing endlessly. They seem to be ceaseless in their motion.

9. **Dear Child**—Caroline, Wordsworth's natural daughter by Annette Vallon. During his first visit to France in 1791, Wordsworth had fallen in love with Annette Vallon, a French girl belonging to a family with strong Royalist sympathies. He could not marry her, but she bore him a daughter in December, 1792.

10-11. **If thou appear...less divine**—If the child does not feel inspired by the beauty of the natural scene and if it does not create in her any solemn thought, it does not mean that her nature is less divine.

12. **Abraham's bosom**—The departed souls of the blessed people are supposed to find rest in Abraham's bosom. This line suggests that the child is ever in a blessed state.

13. **Temple's inner shrine**—it refers to the Holy of Holies in Solomon's Temple.

14. **God being with thee...it not**—The child's soul is naturally reverent. It retains in its subconscious the sense of the divine presence though we are not aware of it.

25

French Revolution

AS IT APPEARED TO ENTHUSIASTS AT ITS COMMENCEMENT

I. TEXT

Oh ! pleasant exercise of hope and joy !
 For mighty were the auxiliars which then stood
 Upon our side, we who were strong in love !
 Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive,
 But to be young was very heaven !—Oh ! times, 5
 In which the meagre, stale, forbidding ways
 Of custom, law, and statute, took at once
 The attraction of a country in romance !
 When Reason seemed the most to assert her rights,
 When most intent on making of herself 10
 A prime Enchantress—to assist the work,
 Which then was going forward in her name !
 Not favoured spots alone, but the whole earth,
 The beauty wore of promise, that which sets
 (As at some moment might not be unfelt 15
 Among the bowers of paradise itself)
 The budding rose above the rose full blown.
 What temper at the prospect did not wake
 To happiness unthought of ? The inert
 Were roused, and lively natures rapt away ! 20
 They who had fed their childhood upon dreams,
 The playfellows of fancy, who had made
 All powers of swiftiness, subtilty, and strength
 Their ministers,—who in lordly wise had stirred
 Among the grandest objects of the sense, 25
 And dealt with whatsoever they found there
 As if they within some lurking right
 To wield it ;—they, too, who, of gentle mood,
 Had watched all gentle motions, and to these
 Had fitted their own thoughts, schemers more mild, 30
 And in the region of their peaceful selves ;—
 Now was it that both found, the meek and lofty
 Did both find, helpers to their heart's desire,
 And stuff at hand, plastic as they could wish ;
 Were called upon to exercise their skill, 35

Not in Utopia, subterranean fields,
 Or some secreted island, Heaven knows where !
 But in the very world, which is the world
 Of all of us,—the place where in the end
 We find our happiness, or not at all !

40

II. SUBSTANCE

The breaking forth of the French Revolution was an occasion of great rejoicing for the enthusiastic revolutionaries. They had a large number of supporters who were all infused with a spirit of love for humanity. It was a blessing to be alive on that occasion and witness the mighty transformation gradually coming all over the world. But if someone were young, he would really be having a heavenly experience. It was a time for all that was small, uninteresting and tyrannical to change into something new and wonderful. Reason herself was a great enchantress who was assisting the work of creating a new world. France was, of course, a favoured spot, and was changing. But in fact a change was coming all over the world. The whole earth seemed to be holding forth the promise of change, and since promises are even more enjoyable than actual fulfilment, it was really an occasion of great rejoicing. Even those who had just led a passive existence were aroused and they began to see some meaning in their life, while those who were active and awake to the socio-political situation about them experienced rapture itself.

It was now an opportunity for the visionary people to use all their skill and translate their dreams into reality, as they made France a happy place to live in. The mild and gentle had an equally good opportunity of engaging themselves in the work of creating a new world. The stuff was ready to be shaped, and there were helpers to aid them in their work. It is possible to get happiness only in this world, and not in some Utopia, some subterranean fields, that, in all probability, do not exist anywhere. We find happiness either here, in our own world, or we do not find it at all.

III. CRITICAL ESTIMATE

Introduction

French Revolution, written in 1804, attempts to recapitulate the emotions of the enthusiastic supporters of the Revolution at its commencement. Wordsworth himself was one of its great supporters. He had first landed in Calais on 13th July, 1790, on the eve of the first anniversary of the fall of the Bastille. The whole nation was full of rejoicing, and Wordsworth witnessed scenes of wonderful enthusiasm among people all around. He found himself overwhelmed and infected by their ardour. This scene remained deeply entrenched in his mind. The ensuing years brought him disillusionment. He saw a reign of tyranny let loose on the people of France and his faith was shaken. But he did remember how he as well as the common people of France had felt in the beginning, and it is these

feelings he has tried to project in *French Revolution*. It must be said to Wordsworth's credit that he has not allowed the later disillusionment to interfere with the emotions being expressed here. He has captured the enthusiasm of the supporters of the French Revolution in its entirety, without allowing it to be diluted.

The Development of Thought

In the first half of the poem, Wordsworth gives us the picture of the Revolution as the breaking forth of a new life that would change the very face of the earth. The Revolution had its ardent admirers everywhere and the revolutionaries could get as much help and support as they asked for. They were all bound together with feelings of love for humanity and felt that this was an occasion of great rejoicing. The poet distils the reaction of the revolutionaries into celebrated lines :

Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive,
But to be young was very heaven.

Time had come for all that was meagre and stale in 'custom, law and statute' to change into something new and wonderful. France seemed to be like a country in romance. Reason was a great enchantress and was assisting the work of creating a new world. Not only some places like France but the whole world seemed to be undergoing some kind of transformation. Promises are usually enjoyed more than fulfilment, and Revolution held forth mighty promises. So it was really a time of great rejoicing. The inert were roused and lively natures were just caught in a rapture.

In the latter half of the poem, the poem describes two types of men, the lofty and the meek and calls upon both these types to work to make this world an abode of happiness. The lofty were the people who had fed their childhood upon dreams. They were the playfellows of fancy. They were swift, subtle and strong. They had entertained grandest passions. The meek were a gentle lot. Their thoughts were in keeping with gentle motions. They had perhaps been making plans in their own minds. But now it was time for both, the meek and the lofty, to fulfil their desires, for they had stuff at their hand, as flexible as they could wish, and they had as many helpers as they needed. Now it was time for them to exercise all their skill and create a heaven for themselves, not in some Utopian land, or in some subterranean fields, but here, in this very world, which is the world of all of us, for it is

the place where in the end
We find our happiness, or not at all.

IV. NOTES

1. **Oh ! pleasant.....joy**—The enthusiasts felt that the commencement of the French Revolution was an occasion of great rejoicing and cherishing mighty hopes.

2-3. **Mighty were.....side**—The revolutionaries had very powerful people to help them. **Auxiliars**—helpers, supporters.

3. **We who were.....love**—The enthusiastic derived all their strength from their love of humanity.

4-5. **Bliss was heaven !**—It would have been a blessing to be alive on the day the revolution was to begin ; but if someone were young then, he would be having a heavenly experience. These are two of the most celebrated lines written by Wordsworth.

5-8. **Oh ! times romance**—France seemed to be quite a changed land. It looked like a country in romance. And all that was small, decaying and forbidding in customs, conventions and laws was undergoing a kind of change. The petty, useless and tyrannous ways of life were being replaced by the large, vital and humane practices. This was a unique experience and the people felt that theirs was a country in romance.

Meagre—small, narrow-minded. **Stale**—decaying, useless. **Forbidding**—tyrannous.

9-12. Reason wanted to assert her rights. She was determined to prove that she was a great enchantress, for she wanted to assist the work that was going on in her name. The Revolution was being ushered in the name of reason. For reason clearly dictated that there was no justification in continuing the tyrannical practices of the Government and the slogans of liberty, equality and fraternity given by the revolutionaries ought to be realised.

13-17. France was, of course, a favoured spot, for the revolution was beginning there. But not only favoured spots but the whole earth wore the beauty of fair promises that very soon it would become a new land.

13. **Favoured spots**—spots favoured by the Revolution—places like France where the Revolution was breaking out.

14. **The beauty**—promise. The whole earth held out the promise of a kind of transformation.

14-17. **That which sets the budding rose above the rose full blown**—Promises look sweeter than fulfilment. The budding rose symbolises promise ; the full blown rose represents fulfilment.

15-16. **As at some moment.....itself**—This must be the practice in heaven also.

18-19. **What temper.....unthought of**—All the people were excited to think of the unique happiness that was in store for them. **What temper did not wake**—whatever be the nature of a person, he was definitely aroused. **At the prospect**—at the hope of seeing a transformed land. **Happiness unthought of**—unique happiness that they would experience in France when it would be a transformed land.

19-20. **The inert.....away**—Wordsworth here divides the people into two classes : the inert and the lively. The inert were the people who were leading a very passive existence. Socially and politically they were unenlightened. But here was no occasion on which even the inert were aroused. They too started seeing some kind of significance in their life. The lively were the active participants. At least they had enthusiastically watched the changing political climate of the country. Now they felt that the hopes they had been entertaining were about to be realised. So they were experiencing a kind of rapturous joy. **Inert**—people who were leading a passive existence. **Roused**—excited, awakened. **Lively natures**—people who were taking an active part. **Rapt away**—lost in rapturous joy.

21. **They**—the mighty, the lofty. The enthusiasts also are divided into two classes—the lofty and the meek. The lofty people had been cherishing dreams since their childhood. They were people of strong passions. They were swift, subtle and strong. The meek, on the other hand had been making plans 'in the region of their peaceful selves'.

21. **Who had fed dreams**—Who had been dreaming of a revolution that would put an end to tyranny and social injustice and usher into an era of peace and prosperity ever since their childhood.

22. **The playfellows of fancy**—People with imagination.

22-24. **Who had made...ministers**—Who were swift, subtle and strong. **Subtilty**—cleverness. **Ministers**—helpers.

24. **Lordlywise**—like a lord.

24-25. **Had stirred.....sense**—like a lord they had been moving among the grandest objects that would appeal to their senses. They had very strong passions like a lord. **Stirred**—moved.

25-28. **And dealt.....wield it**—They dealt with these grand objects of sense as if they had a right to deal with them as they liked. They felt that their passions were justified and they had a right to fulfil them. **Lurking**—hidden. **Wield**—hold, carry.

28. **They**—people of gentle mood, the meek, the second category of people about whom the poet is talking.

28-30. **They, too..... thoughts**—Then there were the meek people. Their actions and thoughts were gentle. They perhaps were not in favour of violent means like a revolution.

30. **Schemers more mild**—they too had plans of their own but their plans did not involve violence.

33. **Did both find desire**—Now both the meek and the lofty could get as much support as they wanted.

34. **And stuff.. wish**—The whole country lay before them in a plastic, that is, flexible condition. The earlier rule of tyranny had been done away with. Now the political situation in the country was fluid. It depended upon the people to do whatever they wanted, to give their country any shape they liked.

35-37. **Were called.....where**—Both the meek and the lofty were called upon to exercise their skill and make their country a happy place to live in. The ideal place for living is not to be found in some Utopia, or subterranean fields; it exists in our own world. And it is for us to make it. **Utopia**—an imaginary state described in Sir Thomas More's Latin political romance *Utopia*; any imaginary state of ideal perfection. **Subterranean fields**-- underground fields.

38-40. Our own world is the place where in the end we find happiness, or we do not find it at all.

Predman K. S. D. D. D. D.
M.A. Pol. Sc. Eco. L. L. L. L. L.
Motiyar Rainwater
SRINAGER-190003
KASHMIR

26

Sonnet on Sonnet

I. TEXT

Scorn not the Sonnet ; Critic, you have frowned,
Mindless of its just honours ; with this key
Shakespeare unlocked his heart ; the melody
Of this small lute gave ease to Petrarch's wound ;
A thousand times this pipe did Tasso sound ;
With it Camoens soothed an exile's grief ;
The Sonnet glittered a gay myrtle leaf
Amidst cypress with which Dante crowned
His visionary brow : a glow-worm lamp,
It cheered mild Spenser, called from Faeryland
To struggle through dark ways ; and, when a damp
Fell round the path of Milton, in his hand
The Thing became a trumpet ; whence he blew
Soul-animating strains—alas, too few !

II. SUBSTANCE

The poet exhorts the critic not to ignore the importance of the sonnet as a verse form and be contemptuous of it. Shakespeare used it most successfully to give expression to his deeply felt emotions. Petrarch employed it to give comfort to his love-laden heart. This was the verse form that Tasso used most frequently. When in exile, Camoens wrote a number of sonnets to ease his heart of his grief. Dante found sonnet to be the most exquisite verse form to embody his visionary flights. When Spenser fell on evil days, he found solace in composing sonnets. In the same way when Milton had to face misfortunes in his life he too turned to writing sonnets. In Milton's hands, the sonnet almost became a trumpet. And he blew 'soul-animating strains' through it. But it is rather a matter of regret that Milton wrote only a few sonnets.

III. CRITICAL ESTIMATE

Introduction

The *Sonnet on Sonnet*, published in 1827, expresses Wordsworth's great admiration for the sonnet as a verse form. It also

shows his awareness of the fact that almost all great poets used sonnet to express their thoughts and emotions.

The sonnet is a verse form consisting of fourteen lines in English iambic pentametre and a complicated rhyme scheme. The word 'sonnet' is derived from the Italian word *sonnetto* which means 'a little sound'. Apparently this verse form was devised in Italy in the early thirteenth century. Dante was the first great poet to use it. That is why he is often considered to be the father of the sonnet. Later Petrarch used it widely. In England Sir Thomas Wyatt and the Earl of Surrey popularised the sonnet in the early sixteenth century. Later on, it was widely used by Spenser, Sidney, Daniel, Drayton, Shakespeare and even Milton. After Milton, it was almost forgotten, for the great Neo-classic poets. Dryden and Pope wrote satire in heroic couplet. It was revived in the late eighteenth century by Gray and Cowper. Wordsworth wrote a number of memorable sonnets.

The Development of Thought

Since the sonnet demands very rigorous discipline from the poet but does not offer much scope for the expatiation of his thoughts, a number of poets and critics have been rather harsh upon it. Donne, for example, is reported to have said, "He is a fool which cannot make one Sonnet, and he is mad which makes two." And E.A. Robinson longed for a poet 'to put these little sonnet-men to flight'. Wordsworth genuinely felt that those who were contemptuous of the sonnet were unable to appreciate its potentialities as a great form of poetry. So he implores the critic not to frown upon it.

Wordsworth then goes on to cite the examples of many poets, both English and continental, who used it with great success. Shakespeare wrote a sonnet sequence consisting of 154 sonnets addressed to W.H. and to his mistress; 'a black beauty'. Both the might be just like a small lute, but its melody was able to write a love-laden heart of the Italian poet Petrarch. Tasso, Camoes was number of sonnets. When the great Portuguese poet felt greatly exiled, in his grief he turned to composing sonnets. Dante crown-relieved. Sonnet was the 'gay myrtle leaf' with which that illumined his 'visionary brow'. It was the 'glow-worm' of Milton, he wrote the dark days of Spenser. When misfortune came, the sonnet became some most inspiring sonnets. In Milton's hands, the sonnet became a trumpet. It is really a matter of regret that Milton did not write many sonnets.

Note. The sonnet is often divided into two forms—Petrarchan and Shakespearean, according to the rhyme scheme employed in it. The Petrarchan sonnet has two parts of eight and six lines respectively—the octave and the sestet. The octave has two rhymes and the rhyme scheme is *a b b a a b b a*; the sestet has two or three rhymes different from those employed in the octave and the rhyme scheme is *c d c d c d* or *c d e c e e*. The Shakespearean sonnet consists of three

quatrains with alternate rhymes (usually, but not necessarily, different in each quatrain) followed by one couplet. Thus the rhyme scheme is *a b a b, c d c d, e f e f, g g*. Wordsworth usually wrote the Petrarchan form.

IV. NOTES

1. **Scorn not the Sonnet**—do not be contemptuous of the sonnet as a verse form.

1. **Forwne'd**—felt critical.

2. **Mindless of its just honours**—not caring for the honour the sonnet duly deserves. The sonnet as a form of poetry has great potentialities.

3. **Shakespeare unlocked his heart**—Shakespeare expressed his emotions in his sonnets. Shakespeare's sequence of sonnets, addressed to W.H. and to his mistress, 'a dark beauty', was published in 1606.

4. **This small lute**—the lute is a stringed instrument. It is often used as a symbol of poetry. Hence it is used as a symbol of the sonnet. It is called 'this small lute' because the sonnet consists of only fourteen lines.

4. **Petrarch** (1304—74)—Italian poet. His *Canzoniere* was the first great sonnet cycle. Most of these sonnets describe the author's pure love for a young married woman, Laura de Sade.

5. **Tasso** (1544—95)—Great Italian poet, mainly known for his epic *Rinaldo* and a verse pastoral *Aminta*, but also for his sonnets.

6. **Camoens** (1524—80)—Luis de Camoes was a Portuguese epic and lyric poet. He was exiled either to India or China, there to assist in the spreading and maintenance of Latin culture. Wordsworth imagines that Camoes lessened the grief of exile by writing sonnets.

7. **Myrtle**—an evergreen shrub with beautiful and fragrant leaves; dedicated to Venus; symbolic of love as well as artistic achievement.

8. **Cypress**—a tree whose branches used to be carried at funerals; hence a symbol of death.

8. **Dante** (1265—1321)—Great Italian poet, the first poet to use the sonnet successfully in *Vita Nuova*. He wrote his sonnets expressing his love for Beatrice, who died at a very young age. Wordsworth is trying to suggest that after the death of Beatrice, the sonnets that Dante wrote brought him comfort as well as recognition.

10. **Spenser** (1552—69)—Spenser wrote a sonnet sequence *Amoretti* consisting of eighty-eight sonnets addressed to Elizabeth Boyle. These sonnets are unique for their purity. They tell the story of a love untainted by sin or remorse.

11. **When a damp fell round the path of Milton**—When misfortunes befell Milton. Wordsworth is perhaps alluding to Milton's getting blind.

13. **This thing became a trumpet**—Milton used the sonnet in a very forceful way. Trumpet is a martial instrument that infuses in the others. The reference here may be to Milton's *Massacre of Piedmont* occasioned by the slaughter of Protestants by the Duke of Savoy.

ating strains—highly inspiring lyrics. This probably to sonnets like *On His Blindness*, which is

few !—The poet feels sorry that Milton wrote



27

Nuns Fret Not

I. TEXT

Nuns fret not at their convent's narrow room ;
And hermits are contented with their cells ;
And students with their pensive citadels ;
Maids at the wheel, the weaver at his loom,
Sit blithe and happy ; bees that soar for bloom,
High as the highest Peak of Furness-fells,
Will murmur by the hour in foxglove bells :
In truth the prison, unto which we doom
Ourselves, no prison is : and hence for me,
In sundry moods, 't was pastime to be bound
Within the Sonnet's scanty plot of ground ;
Pleased if some Souls (for such there needs must be)
Who have felt the weight of too much liberty,
Should find brief solace there, as I have found.

II. SUBSTANCE

Nuns do not grumble at their confinement in a convent, where their freedom of movement is severely curtailed. Hermits welcome the solitude of their cells. Students happily accept the discipline of their schools and colleges. Both the young girls at their spinning wheels and the weavers at their looms feel happy with their work. All of these have to face some restriction of movement, but it never causes them any fretfulness. Even the bees, capable of flying as high as the highest peak of Furness-fells, can spend many an hour in foxglove bells to collect nectar for honey.

The truth is that what we deem as prison is no prison at all. Sonnet, a small poem of just fourteen lines, imposes a very great restriction on the poet's creative spirit. But the poet never felt hampered by it. He felt it quite interesting to be bound within "the Sonnet's scanty plot of ground". He felt happy that, like him, there were some other poets also who looked upon their liberty as a burden and comfort in the brief space offered by the sonnet. As for him, whenever he was tired of writing long poems he turned to the sonnet and felt happy in composing one.

III. CRITICAL ESTIMATE

Introduction

Nuns Fret Not, published in 1806, is an important sonnet of Wordsworth emphasising his love of the sonnet as a verse form. Since the sonnet consists of just fourteen lines, and since it has a very rigorous structure leaving scope for very little variation, it is one of the most difficult verse forms to practise. The thought has to be carefully pruned to fit into the brief frame. Sometimes the poets feel its restrictions too deterring to be encouraged to attempt it. Wyatt and Surrey popularised it in England. Shakespeare, Spenser and Sidney wrote sonnet sequences. Milton also wrote a few sonnets. After Milton, it lost popularity until the late eighteenth century. But Wordsworth was quite fascinated by it.

The Development of Thought

Since the sonnet curtails the poet's liberty, Wordsworth begins by citing the examples of those who willingly accept the curtailment of their liberty. The atmosphere in a convent is austere. The nuns are expected to practise self-denial and renunciation. All indulgence is frowned upon. Yet the nuns, eager for their spiritual advancement, do not fret at the restrictions imposed upon them. The hermits are contented with their cells ; which may be small and narrow but which are conducive to meditation. Students are young and are by nature, gay and ebullient. Yet even they willingly accept the discipline of their schools and colleges, appreciating the fact that a certain seriousness of atmosphere is necessary for the acquisition of knowledge. Young girls feel happy to work at their spinning wheels ; the weavers feel happy to work at their looms. The sense of achievement in their work makes up for the little element of monotony involved in it.

Next, the poet takes an example from nature. The bees are all the time flying from flower to flower. And they are capable of great flights ; they can fly as high as the highest peak of Furness-fells. But even the bees suspend their flight and happily settle down on the foxglove bells so that they may collect nectar for preparing honey. The poet feels that a little restriction on liberty is essential for some fruitful and rewarding activity.

The poet, then, asserts that what we think as prison is, in fact, no prison. Our thinking is coloured by our prejudices and what is merely discipline is interpreted as confinement. He says that whenever he was in a sundry mood, he turned to writing a sonnet. He thought of writing a sonnet as some kind of recreation and not as a burdensome activity. He also felt happy that he was not alone in thinking in this vein. Some other poets also thought the same way. They also felt burdened by too much liberty and sought comfort in observing the discipline of the sonnet.

IV. NOTES

1. **Fret not**—are not annoyed.

Convent—monastery, a building in which nuns live.

1. **Narrow room**—the grave and austere atmosphere of the convent, in which the nuns are not allowed the freedom of movement.

3. **Pensive**—meditative, serious and thoughtful.

3. **Citadels**—schools, colleges, hostels.

4. **Loom**—a machine for weaving cloth.

5. **Blithe**—gay, cheerful.

5. **Soar**—to fly very high.

5. **For bloom**—in search of flowers.

6. **Furness-fells**—the name of a mountain range.

7. **By the hour**—for many hours constantly.

7. **Foxglove bell**—the name of a flower.

8—9. **The prison unto which we doom ourselves**—the curtailment of liberty which we impose upon ourselves voluntarily.

10. **Sundry**—diverse, varied.

10. **Pastime**—recreation, a source of entertainment.

11. **Bound**—confined.

11. **Sonnet's scanty plot of ground**—the limited space offered by the sonnet. Since the sonnet consists only of fourteen lines, it offers very limited space to the poet to express his ideas.

14. **Who have felt the weight of too much liberty**—who consider unrestricted freedom to be burdensome.

14. **Solace**—comfort.

G.M. College of Education
Bantalab
Raipur,
Jammu

Acc. No.
Dated 4/11

2675 (D)
2015

OUR PUBLICATIONS

By Dr. Raghukul Tilak

- T.S. ELIOT:
1. The 'Waste Land' and Other Poems
 2. The Critic
 3. Murder in the Cathedral
 4. The Cocktail Party
 5. The Family Reunion
- BERNARD SHAW:
6. Man and Superman
 7. Arms and the Man
 8. Saint Joan
 9. Candida
 10. Major Barbara
- GEORGE ELIOT:
11. Middlemarch
 12. Mill on the Floss
 13. Adam Bede
- ARISTOTLE:
14. The Poetics
- COLERIDGE:
15. Biographia Literaria
- WORDSWORTH:
16. Preface to the Lyrical Ballads
- DRYDEN:
17. An Essay of Dramatic Poesy
- SIDNEY:
18. An Apology for Poetry
- JOHN WEBSTER:
19. The Duchess of Malfi
- VIRGINIA WOOLF:
20. To the Lighthouse
 21. Mrs. Dalloway
- W.M. THACKERAY
22. Vanity Fair
- JOSEPH CONRAD:
23. Lord Jim
- ROBERT BROWNING:
24. Select Poems, Vol. I
 25. Select Poems, Vol. II
- ALFRED TENNYSON:
26. Select Poems
- W.H. AUDEN
27. Select Poems
- Ascent of F-6
- JOHN DONNE:
29. Select Poems
- JOHN MILTON:
30. Minor Poems
- MATTHEW ARNOLD:
31. Essays in Criticism

- SHAKESPEARE:
32. Much Ado About Nothing (Text with Annotations)
 33. Henry IV, Part I (Text with Annotations)
 34. Henry IV, Part I (A Critical Study)
 35. Richard II (Text with Annotations)
 36. Richard II (A critical study)
 37. A Midsummer Night's Dream (Study Guide Notes) with objective type Questions-Answers
 38. Twelfth Night (Study Guide Notes) (do)
 39. As You Like It (Study Guide Notes) (do)
 40. The Merchant of Venice (Study Guide Notes) (do)
- ROBERT FROST
41. Select Poems
- WALT WHITMAN:
42. Select Poems
- EUGENE O'NEILL:
43. The Hairy Age
 44. Desire Under the Elms
 45. The Iceman Cometh
- R.K. NARAYAN:
46. The Guide
- TAGORE:
47. Gitanjali
- RAJA RAO:
48. Kanthapura
 49. The Serpent and the Rope
- KAMALA MARKANDAYA:
50. Nectar in a Sieve
- MULK RAJ ANAND:
51. Coolie
 52. Untouchable
- SAROJINI NAIDU:
53. Select Poems
- SRI AUROBINDO
54. Savitri, Book I and Other Poems
 55. New Indian English Poets & Poetry
 56. History and Principles of Literary Criticism
 57. New Criticism and New Critics
 58. Background to English Literature (A study of literary forms)
- DYLAN THOMAS:
59. Select Poems
 60. New Pattern English Grammar and Composition